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THE

MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR:

AN EXPOSITION OF THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION.

BY THE REV.

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Μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου

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TO THE HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

CHARLES BRODRICK BERNARD, D.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF TUAM, KILLALA, AND ACHONRY,

In Grateful Recognition

NOT ONLY OF THE PRIVILEGES AND BLESSINGS WHICH ARE INSEPARABLY CONNECTED WITH HIS SACRED OFFICE, BUT ALSO IN ADMIRATION OF HIS HIGH PERSONAL QUALITIES BOTH OF HEAD AND HEART,

THESE PAGES

IN ELUCIDATION OF OUR BLESSED LORD'S LAST WORDS TO THE CHURCHES, ARE MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH no portion of the New Testament possesses more interest for the Christian student, or conveys a deeper instruction, than the first three chapters of the Book of the Revelation, which contain the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, perhaps there are fewer expositions of these Epistles, in separate form, than of any other section of Sacred Scripture.

Next to the Holy Land, Asia Minor has associations and memories which make it dear to every Christian heart. It may be called the cradle of Christianity; for if Judea was the birthplace of its Founder, Asia Minor was the scene of its earliest trials and triumphs. Here St. Paul spent several years of his life, and he wrote Epistles to, at least, three of its Churches. Towards Asia Minor he directed his steps on each of his three missionary journeys. At Ephesus he placed Timothy, whom he calls his own son in the faith; and there is no more affecting address than that delivered by St. Paul, when bidding the elders of Ephesus farewell at Miletus. Possibly after the martyrdom of St. Paul, St. John left Jerusalem, and settled at Ephesus; but we find that he was banished under Domitian, A.D. 95.

These Epistles, which were written by St. John, when in his exile at Patmos, are the last words of Christ to the Churches; and, as such, they are weighty, and worthy of serious consideration by all classes of professing Christians. With the exception of the able Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches, written by Archbishop Trench, there is scarcely any other in which the subject-matter of these Messages is treated critically and exegetically.

There is a popular Commentary by the present Dean of Wells, Dr. Plumptre, which, while it contains much that is valuable and instructive, loses considerably in its claim to acceptance on account of the author contending for an earlier date for the Apocalypse than that commonly assigned, and thereby occasioning no little obscurity and confusion in the interpretation. In the exposition now offered, it would be hardly possible for me to claim to be an independent worker, as I have availed myself of any materials within my reach by which the work might be rendered more full, and the interpretation more clear and explicit; still I venture to hope that there will be found a considerable amount of expository matter, the entire of which, if not absolutely original in its conception, may claim to be new at least in method and illustration.

The Greek Text is that of Bishop Wordsworth's Greek Testament, a book which embodies the most elaborate collation of the best MSS., the results of the most recent Recensions, and a careful and judicious selection from the various Readings, making the Text to approximate as closely as it is possible to perfection. And in referring to the Greek text of

that elaborate work, I may venture to add that the appended notes are also of the highest value, marked as they are with profound erudition and wide patristic research, while in every page a fragrance of fervent piety is diffused, which is redolent of heaven.

The Translation is as close as it is allowable for the Greek idiom to warrant, so as strictly to preserve the correct meaning of the original. The Revised New Testament has, in most cases, been adhered to as being generally exact; but where the Greek Text required a different rendering, there has been no hesitation in taking an independent course.

The explanatory remarks on each verse are such as have suggested themselves as the obvious interpretation, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, irrespective of any claims of authority, or any desire to follow implicitly the footsteps of those who have preceded me in the same path.

If I have ventured to differ from others, it is in no presumptuous or self-confident spirit; for in handling the Word of God, one must proceed calmly and carefully, and, by prayerful guidance, endeavour to ascertain what is really intended by its Divine Author. Except at the beginnning of the Message to each Church, I have not entered, to any great extent, into historical matter, the chief place being given to the systematic interpretation of each verse, not only in its general scope, but in its practical bearings; and when subjects of controversy or dogmatic theology have presented themselves, as, for example, "the beginning of the Creation of God," as applied to Christ, "the second death," the "white raiment," the worthiness of the faithful of Sardis, the power

of the keys, "the New Jerusalem," the reigning with Christ in His kingdom, I have carefully avoided all novel or unauthorized speculations, and have endeavoured to give such expositions as are, in my own opinion, warranted by the general teaching of God's word, and are in harmony with the Creeds and Articles of the Church.

On the subject of unfulfilled prophecy, which has been but slightly alluded to in one or two instances, I have always felt that extreme caution is necessary, and that we have no right to dogmatize, or speculate, in treating of the mysteries of the Seven Sealed Book, which is in the hands of Christ; yet, at the same time, we are not forbidden to notice—on the contrary, we are rather justified in observing—the landmarks laid down for our guidance, and we are directed to shape our course accordingly, so that we may be like men that wait for their Lord's return, and have the blessing of those servants whom, when He cometh, He shall find watching (Luke xii. 37).

The following works I have consulted, and have derived from them important aid, for which I cannot but express my obligations:—Archbishop Trench, *Epistles to the Seven Churches;* Bishop Wordsworth, *Greek Testament with Notes;* Dr. Tristram's *Seven Golden Candlesticks*, a work which is most valuable in treating the subject from a historic point of view; *Epistles to the Seven Churches*, by Dr. Plumptre, Dean of Wells; *Bampton Lectures*, by Canon Liddon; Meyer, amongst German writers, I am specially indebted to; and the *Gnomon of the New Testament*, by Bengel. Much valuable help has also been obtained from Stier, *Words of the*

Risen Saviour; Bishop Lightfoot's *Churches of the Lycus*, and the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, published by Messrs. T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh.

Here I must not omit to express my heartfelt thanks to my friend and fellow-labourer in the same diocese, the Rev. James Treanor, M.A., Rector of Ballinrobe, who has rendered me valuable assistance in correcting the proof sheets of this work when passing through the press, and who has also given me the benefit of his kind suggestions.

I do not expect that freedom from error has in all things been attained in a work that has been written amid the necessary calls of public duty, and the distracting influence of numerous cares; but I have employed all my endeavour so as to prevent any passage, or subject connected therewith, escaping my notice, without offering what I believed a just and fair interpretation of it. We treasure our Lord's Sermon on the Mount as containing the true ethical precepts of His kingdom; not less so should we hold in estimation these messages to the Churches, as the last words of the Risen Saviour coming from heaven to men; and, when we hear these Divine utterances, we should feel that they are the voice of Him who has proclaimed Himself as "the Resurrection and the Life," and who will not again speak until His redeemed Church shall hail His Second Advent, and say—"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." If Churches and individuals can only see themselves represented in some of the pictures of these Apocalyptic Churches portrayed by the hand of Him "unto whom all hearts are open," and learn the lessons intended to be conveyed by

the Messages which proceeded from the Saviour's lips through His inspired servant, then much benefit and blessing might be expected to follow. If lessons of patience under suffering, firmness under persecution, faithfulness in times of temptation, zeal for God in our Christian profession, and a growing attachment to Christ amid all the changes and chances of life—if these lessons are acquired, and enforced, by whatever exposition these pages may contain, no greater object could be desired; nor could any higher reward be conferred upon the writer, to whom the investigation of this department of Sacred Truth has been a labour of love, and the time occupied in its study "a time of refreshing."

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Seven Churches of Asia Minor, to which our blessed Lord sent messages by His servant, St. John, were situated in the western portion of that country, not far remote from the shores of the Ægean Sea. They lay in a group chiefly in the provinces of Lydia and Ionia, which two divisions embraced what are called Proconsular Asia. In this limited signification, we find the term, "Asia," so used in the Acts of the Apostles, as, for example, when Demetrius told his fellow craftsmen that St. Paul had persuaded and turned away much people, not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia (Acts xix. 26). The entire district was not more than one hundred miles square; and, besides the Seven Churches to which Epistles were written, there were other Churches of no less importance included within these restricted limits. There were, on the banks of the river Meander, three cities, *Magnesia*, *Hierapolis*, and *Colossæ*, and a fourth, *Tralles*, a little to the north of that river, in all of which there were flourishing Christian Churches when St. John wrote; but these are unnoticed in the Apocalyptic "Vision." There must have been a special design in this.

The Revelation is a book of symbol. While it is the last book of prophecy—the only prophetic book, properly so called, of the New Testament—its prophecies are unfolded in a series of visions, a kind of prophetic tableau, successively

exhibiting the dispensations of God's providence to His Church, from the early days of Christianity until the Second Advent and the final Judgment. Just as all the progressive stages of the earth's history, before man's creation, were unfolded before the eye of the Hebrew prophet and lawgiver, until, in the six days' work, the entire series had been fully brought to view ;[1] so here, in the vision of the Apocalypse, symbolic representations of events which were to happen were made to pass before the eye of the Apostle until, like some dissolving view, the Church's long night of sorrow melted away into the light of heaven.

The typical number, *seven*, is employed as the symbol of perfection, or completeness,[2] and in this sense it frequently occurs in the Apocalypse—denoting that these messages sent to the Seven Churches were for all Churches throughout the world, and for all time. In accordance with this view, it has been noticed by some of the early Christian writers that St. Paul wrote Epistles to Seven *Gentile* Churches, because what he wrote to them he wrote to all ;[3] and we are therefore no more warranted in appropriating the consolations, and hopes, the warnings and rebukes, addressed to the Asiatic Churches, as solely for their own edification and improvement, than we are in confining St. Paul's writings to the Churches of the age when he wrote. The Churches of Asia Minor are clearly representative. They are types of the Universal Church in its varied phases of spiritual life, and are designed so to be until that day when her absent Lord shall return, and when His people shall, out of every nation, and kindred, and tribe, stand in His presence, one glorious Church, "without spot, or blemish, or any such thing."

[1] Kurtz, *Bibel und Astronomie.*
[2] Bähr, *Symbolik des Mos. Cult.*, vol. i. p. 129.
[3] Cyprian, *De Exhort. Martyr.*, c. 11.

Schemes of Interpretation.

Some entertain the notion that, while these Churches are representative, they are so not only as descriptive of the spiritual condition of the Church of every age, but also as containing the outline of the various states through which the Church of Christ is to pass until the Second Advent of our Lord. *Vitringa*, thus expresses this view: "Omnino igitur existimo Spiritum S. sub typo et emblemate septem Ecclesiarum Asiæ, nobis mystice et prophetice voluisse depingere septem variantes status Ecclesiæ Christianæ, quibus successive conspiceretur usque ad adventum Domini, et omnium rerum finem," etc. This notion is utterly untenable. It has no sanction from antiquity, nor is it borne out by the condition of the Church as recorded in history, from the time of St. John to the present. Archbishop Trench thinks that, because certain Churches of the seven, of small importance, were taken into the number, while others of greater note were omitted, this was for the purpose of supplying types of the different phases the Church was to assume. But it can hardly be seriously supposed that the Church of Ephesus, as addressed by our Lord, through the beloved disciple, could be a type of the Christian Church in the first or second century, or Smyrna, the representative of the succeeding age. The idea conveyed by the addresses to the Seven Churches is not progression. If anything is clearly seen, it is that they are all communicated with at the same time, and that the substance of the message—indeed the very introduction of the Speaker in each case—applies directly to the condition of each Church, and is adapted specially to the circumstances under which the particular Church addressed was placed. "Where the literal interpretation will stand, the farthest from it is the worst." This is one of the rules of the judicious Hooker; and when men look for a prophetic meaning in plain historic narrative,

they betray all the weakness of a vain imagination, that would be wise above what is written, and, Icarus-like, foolishly attempt to penetrate beyond the cloud which hides the dim and distant future from the eye of mortals.

Vitringa sees, for example, the Church of Ephesus representing that period which extended from the Day of Pentecost to the persecution under Decius; Smyrna, the period from Decius to Diocletian; Pergamum, from Constantine to the close of the seventh century; Thyatira, the first half of the Middle Ages; Sardis, the period from the twelfth century to the Reformation; Philadelphia, the first century of the Reformation; Laodicea, the Reformed Church at the time he was writing.[1]

There may be in this arrangement certain points of coincidence between the assumed prophecy and the fulfilment; but the application is unnatural, forced, and arbitrary; and any one acquainted with Church history must be aware that there is no connexion between the alleged symbol and the thing signified. Nor does it appear that those who have thought that "the promises in the seven Epistles correspond to the unfolding of the kingdom of God, from its first beginnings on earth to its consummation in heaven," have been more fortunate in their scheme of interpretation. For example—to the faithful in Ephesus is promised "the tree of life in the Paradise of God" (Rev. ii. 7). This, we are told, corresponds to the tree of life in Eden, around which were placed cherubim and a flaming sword. To the faithful in Smyrna, "they shall not be hurt of the second death." This corresponds to what is written regarding the introduction of sin and death into the world. Then the promise made to Pergamum as to the "hidden manna" brings us to the journeying of Israel in the wilderness, and so on. To follow up such *designed* coincidences would only be perverting

[1] *Lange*, vol. ii. p. 472.

Scripture, and seeking for concord and harmony where there was neither affinity nor cohesion—mistaking the foolish and vague fancies of men for the mind of the Spirit of God. Never should we be found taking such unwarrantable liberties in the matter of Scripture interpretation ; but rather like the wheels described in Ezekiel, "when the spirit went they went, and when the spirit stood they stood ;" so should we ever seek to be guided into all truth by Him who alone can make us wise unto salvation.

THE WRITER OF THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES.

There is considerable difference of opinion amongst critics as to the writer of these Messages, and the time when they were sent to the several Churches. The Revelation is very unlike any of the other writings of St. John, so much so, that the genuineness and authenticity of the book have been questioned. Any one reading the Epistles and Gospel would find it hard to recognise the Revelation as the work of the same author, and yet there are certain marks, and finger-posts, which make it clear that they all came from the same source. In the Epistles and Gospel of St. John, the title, "Word," as applied to Christ is found, and this designation is not used by any of the other Apostles and Evangelists. We find this appellation in Rev. xix. 13. In the other writings of St. John, we are reminded of a conflict and a victory in the Christian life ; so in the Messages to the Seven Churches, this "overcoming" is the condition of, and qualification for, the Christian's final glory, honour, and blessedness. The Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ runs, like a silver thread, through all the writings of St. John, and imparts such an individuality of character, as distinguishes them from the writings of any other Apostle ; and this prominently appears in the section of the Revelation now under review.

The Epistles to the Seven Churches were received, retained,

and acknowledged by the Churches of Proconsular Asia as having been written by St. John; and if they had been the work of one who said he was an Apostle, and was not, they would have been rejected. Indeed, the very commendation which St. John gives to the Church of Ephesus for "trying them that said they were Apostles and were not," indicates clearly his own claim to Divine inspiration.

There is a marked peculiarity in all St. John's writings in the affirmation he makes in regard to the accuracy of his testimony: "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true" (John xxi. 24). See also Rev. i. 2, 3; John i. 14, 15; 1 John i. 1, 2.

The designation, "Lamb," and "Lamb of God," as applied to Christ, is specially characteristic of St. John, although he employs a different word in the Revelation from that which he makes use of in the Gospel, to express the title.

The word *ἀρνίον* is used twenty-nine times in the Revelation to describe Christ as the Lamb, while in the Gospel of St. John it only once occurs,—but in a different application —(John xxi. 15), the word *ἀμνὸς* being invariably employed.

Some have thought that this fact is at variance with St. John's having been the author of the Revelation. But they never seem to have inquired whether there was a design in this change. *Ἀρνίον* is an appellation of tender emotion and endearment, and is just such a designation as the beloved disciple would have been likely to use in reference to Him whom he had seen "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," and upon whom he never could expend too great a wealth of love. Although the word is in a diminutive form, it had then lost its diminutive signification, and was well suited to convey the idea of Christ as the sacrificial Lamb in virtue of His death, still sustaining to His people, in His glorified humanity, the most intimate and endearing relation as the Apostle and

High Priest of their profession, and the exalted Head of His Church.

We find *ἀρνίον* first applied to Christ in the Revelation in connexion with the seven-sealed roll which contained a prophetic detail of the Church's sufferings, from the period of the vision of Patmos to the world's close.

In chap. xii. there is a description of the *faithful Church*, symbolized by the woman clothed with the sun; and in chap. xvii., we read of the *faithless Church* under the figure of a woman seated on a scarlet-coloured beast (*θηρίον*), so that there is a contrast presented, as Bishop Wordsworth observes, between the *ἡ πόρνη καὶ τὸ θηρίον* on the one side, and *ἡ νύμφη καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον* on the other; and to make the contrast more marked, the word chosen by St. John (*ἀρνίον*) is exactly adapted.

To argue against St. John's authorship of the Revelation, because in the Gospel the designation, "Lamb," is *ἀμνὸς*, but in the former, *ἀρνίον*, would be to ignore the character and object of these books—the one dealing exclusively, except in the first three chapters, with prophecy and symbol, the other with historic narrative; the one in reference to Christ now glorified on His throne, the other in regard to His humiliation and suffering here on earth.

This change of expression, which is noticeable here, we find in other instances also. When in the Revelation St. John refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, he writes, *Ἱερουσαλήμ*; while in the Gospel alluding to the earthly city it is *Ἱεροσόλυμα*. In like manner *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* in the Gospel designates the literal Jews, the bitter enemies of Christ, yet in the Revelation the term is used to denote the true followers of Christ (ii. 9; iii. 9). So that, although the Apocalypse differs in style and manner from the other writings of the Apostle, this may be accounted for by the difference of subject, and the mode of communication by vision, through which the things he afterwards com-

mitted to writing, were made known to him. By symbol, he was instructed to depict the Church's condition and history, her perils and progress, her sorrows and joys, her trials and triumphs; and while the world kingdoms were in the foreground of the picture in formidable array against the Church, the full and final triumph of Christ over every opposing power was the goal to which all his prophetic disclosures tended.

There is no other Book of Scripture like this; and we may feel assured that no lesser inspiration than that of the Divine Spirit could have enabled the Apostle to place on record the marvellous things contained in it, so far beyond what human foresight could disclose. In parts of Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah, there are some points resembling the Revelation; but nothing equal to it in portraying the chequered history of the Church in the latter days, at the end of which we are taught to expect the complete overthrow of the world power and the establishment of Christ's kingdom—that grand consummation evincing to the universe "the manifold wisdom of God."

That St. John wrote the Revelation was acknowledged universally until the third century, when certain views respecting the millennium having been founded on passages contained in it, by those who were called Chiliasts, to get rid of the arguments put forward by these men, their opponents went so far as to deny the authenticity of the Book; afterwards, however, it regained its ancient authority, and has never since been questioned as to the place it occupies in the Sacred Canon.

Who are Meant by the Angels of the Seven Churches? (Rev. i. 20).

This question is one of considerable difficulty, and has received a variety of answers. The cause of the difficulty has arisen from the term, "Angels," being nowhere else in the New Testament applied to designate the Heads of Churches.

The words, "bishops" and "elders," are frequently used in the Pastoral Epistles as descriptive of those who had the oversight of Churches; but the word, "Angel," in this connexion is a novelty; hence, there are writers who have denied its applicability to presidents, or overseers of Churches, altogether, and who have adhered to the plain and obvious interpretation of the term, as denoting a *heavenly* Angel. Bishop Lightfoot considers the stars as symbolic of the heavenly representatives; the lamps, the earthly realization, the outward embodiment of the Churches. In this view the Angels are regarded as celestial guardians, just as guardian angels are supposed to be set apart for the bodily protection of individuals. Bishop Lightfoot further adds: "Whatever may be the exact conception, the Angel is identified with, and made responsible for, the Church, to a degree wholly unsuited to any human officer."

Against this view there are insuperable difficulties. The idea of Churches having "guardian angels" is not less a novelty than the term, "Angel," being used in the sense of bishop. It is true that in 1 Cor. xi. 10, we read of Angels being present in the worshipping assemblies of God's people; and the argument used by St. Paul for women covering their heads in the Church, thereby exhibiting reverence, submission, and modesty, is "because of the Angels," who are present intermingling in the worship of God, and who veil their faces, in token of their reverence, and are most pleased when they perceive in their fellow-worshippers whatever most conduces to peace, harmony, and edification.

We read, too, that Angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation"; and in Matt. xviii. 10, where our Lord is mentioned as speaking of children, and where He tells His disciples not to despise them, however weak and helpless they may appear to be; the reason is, because they have a dignity and an immortality which will outlive the stars of heaven, and which dignity and immortality

are proved by the fact that "in heaven *their angels* do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."

The words, "their angels" would seem to favour the notion of guardian angels set apart to keep watch and ward over the young; and the Psalmist says: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him,"—showing that not merely to children, but also to all, irrespective of age or sex, who fear the Lord, the same privilege of bodily protection and help in difficulty is afforded But with all these passages, the persons addressed as Angels in the Messages to the Seven Churches have nothing whatever to do. The Angels of the different Churches were to be written to; they were, some of them, reproved and rebuked, while others were approved and praised. This could not apply to heavenly Angels. It could not be said of one of those bright and holy beings who stand before the throne of God, "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against *thee*, because thou hast left thy first love"; or, "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot"; or, if the reading of Rev. ii. 20, *τὴν γυναῖκά σου Ἰεζάβελ*, be correct, which Bishops Wordsworth and Lightfoot consider it to be, there would be a gross incongruity in identifying the Angel of the Church of Thyatira with one of those heavenly spirits, who "neither marry nor are given in marriage." We may, therefore, dismiss this view of the term, Angel, in Rev. i. 20, as utterly unsupported, as inapplicable to the requirements of the case, and too fanciful for a moment to be entertained.

Whatever meaning we may attach to the word, it must be understood as designating some *human being* who held a distinguished place at the head of each of the Churches, and who was its superintendent, and was responsible for its spiritual condition. The person styled "Angel," could not have been an Apostle, as St. John was then the last surviving Apostle of the Twelve. He must, therefore, have been the president,

chief pastor, or head of the Church to which the message was sent; and it was intended that, through him, the subject matter communicated should be conveyed to the particular Church in which he was an overseer. He is closely identified with it; so much so, that it is difficult to decide, in many instances, whether the message is sent directly to himself, or through him to it. If there is praise or blame, the Angel receives either the one or the other, just in proportion as the Church deserves it. Was the Angel then the Bishop of the Church addressed? and, if so, why was not the title, Bishop, used instead of the peculiar designation of Angel?

Timothy had been ordained the first Bishop of Ephesus by St. Paul, many years before the addresses to the Seven Churches were sent, and if he was then at Ephesus, it is remarkable that the word "Angel," should have been used to denote his episcopal office. It does not, however, appear that, in the days of the Apostles, or for some time afterwards, the name bishop, as denoting an order superior to that of presbyter, was in common use, as the words presbyter and bishop, were interchangeable. Even St. Peter calls himself an elder; and St. Paul, in addressing the elders of Ephesus, calls them all by this name; and at the same time speaks of them as overseers (ἐπισκόπους); and on his first Apostolic journey in company with Barnabas, we are told, "they ordained them elders in every Church." These seem to have occupied in the Christian Church a similar position to that which the priests did in the Jewish synagogue; and as in Apostolic times the synagogue was more or less frequented by Christian professors, the model of the Christian Church was adopted from and planned according to the organization of the synagogue.

The council which met at Jerusalem was composed of presbyters, from the number of whom St. James was elected as president; and though Apostles were there, presbyters were associated with them in confirming the decrees of that council.

We might then expect that the term "presbyter," would be that by which the president of each of the Seven Churches should have been designated. It has been observed that the name Bishop was indifferently used for presbyter; but it had not come sufficiently into recognition while the Apostles lived.

Bishop Lightfoot considers the title Bishop as having been first used by Gentile Churches, and that it was suggested by and borrowed from the directors of religious and social clubs among the heathen.[1] He adduces the commissioners appointed by the Greeks to regulate a new colony, as having been designated ἐπίσκοποι, and the Roman magistrates who regulated the sale of provisions, he tells us, also adopted the same title. But in Apostolic times, when St. Paul addresses epistles or salutations to the bishops and deacons, while he makes no mention of presbyters, we must clearly infer that the terms bishop and presbyter were identical.

For half a century from the date of the destruction of Jerusalem, during which there is a perfect blank in ecclesiastical history, we have no sure warrant for ascertaining what were the designations used in the Christian ministry. So long as Apostles lived, the name "Apostles," was the distinctive title; but when they passed away, we may suppose that, in the organization of the different Churches, there were men appointed, who, although they did not pretend to perform the extraordinary functions of the Apostles, in working miracles, or lay claim to possess the gift of tongues, yet were set apart for the supervision and effective administration of the affairs of the Churches. St. Ignatius mentions the three orders of bishops, presbyters and deacons, in his Epistle to Polycarp. "Give heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are obedient to the bishop, to presbyters, to deacons" (τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ, πρεσβυτέροις, διακόνοις); and by this Apostolic

[1] Bishop Lightfoot, *on Phil.*, p. 95.

Father, the bishop is always spoken of as the chief officer of the Church. Now the Epistle to Polycarp was written in the beginning of the second century, as Ignatius suffered martyrdom in the ninth year of Trajan's reign, A.D. 107, so that the title bishop had then been recognised as distinct from that of presbyter. We may believe that those who were set apart by Apostles for the supervision of special communities of Christians, where many Churches were grouped together —such as Ignatius for Antioch, Polycarp for Smyrna, and Clement for Rome—were, in virtue of their office, in a higher position than the presbyters of individual Churches. The letter of Clement of Rome shows this : "The Apostles having appointed elders in every Church, and foreseeing that disputes would arise afterwards, added a codicil, that if they should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their office."[1]

In the Asiatic Church, we may suppose that during the thirty years from the overthrow of Jerusalem to the end of the first century, the organization of these Churches was carried out by St. John. When Jerusalem was destroyed, and the disciples of our Lord scattered abroad, Asia Minor afforded a refuge where they escaped, in some degree, the persecution which sorely tried the Christians in other parts of the Roman empire. Christianity was not new to the people of Proconsular Asia, for there St. Philip had already preached the gospel, and there also St. Andrew had, for a protracted period, laboured. St. Paul and St. Barnabas had in previous times planted many Christian Churches in that country, the former having remained for three years at Ephesus. If after the death of St. James, when the disciples met to appoint a successor, and actually did select Symeon, as Eusebius mentions, there was an apportionment of districts for missionary effort, we may conclude that the portion assigned to St. John was Asia Minor, and that, as an Apostle, he was to

[1] *Clem. Rom.*, § 44, quoted by Bishop Lightfoot, *Comm. on Phil.*, p. 203.

exercise authority and jurisdiction over the Churches in that locality to the end of his life. When he went to Ephesus, if Timothy was already there, having been appointed by St. Paul as bishop, this title does not appear to have carried with it any meaning more than that of chief presbyter, with power to ordain, to appoint, or depose elders.

In all likelihood, "parishes" had not been regularly mapped out, but Churches here and there had been collected and grouped, and presbyters placed in charge of them. Now by what name was such a Church officer as Timothy to be known? He was not an Apostle, although selected to fill the post of honour and of duty which an Apostle had occupied. He was more than an ordinary presbyter, for the functions of his office were such as a mere presbyter could not discharge.

The word "Angel" might fitly express the dignity and importance of the office assigned to him, who held that intermediate position between an Apostle on the one hand, and an ordinary presbyter on the other; and more especially as the period during which this term was applied was a transitional one,—the extraordinary dignity of Apostle conferred directly by Christ passing away with St. John, and the ordinary office of overseer, or bishop, being about to take its place. It is clear that, in the beginning of the second century, the three orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, were recognised, defined, and confirmed. This is shown from the writings of Ignatius already referred to, who speaks of himself as bishop of Antioch, and who expressly specifies the three orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon.[1] Clemens of Alexandria states that St. John went about from city to city in Asia Minor, his purpose being "in some places to establish bishops, in others to consolidate whole Churches, in others again to appoint to the clerical office some one of

[1] Ignat., *Epist. to Polyc.*, 6.

those who had been signified by the Spirit."[1] Of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, Irenæus, his pupil, says, "he had not only been instructed by Apostles, and had conversed with many who had seen Christ, but had also been established by Apostles in Asia, as bishop in the Church at Smyrna,"[2] In the Circular Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, relating to the Martyrdom of Polycarp, that faithful martyr is styled "a truly Apostolic and prophetic teacher, and the Bishop of the Catholic Church which is at Smyrna."[3]

We find then that the term, "Angel," was only of temporary application, and it suited the period of transition between the last of the Apostles and the development of the episcopal office. It was not unknown to the Churches as having been applied to those who spoke in former times in the name of the Lord, such as Malachi, who is called "My Angel, or messenger"; John the Baptist, who is spoken of by the same figure (Mal. iii. 1), and the Jewish priests (Mal. ii. 7). The expression was apposite, however singular it may have appeared. As Dean Plumptre says, "It testified that the servants of God who had been called to this special office were to lead on earth an angel's life; that they, both in the liturgical and the ministerial aspects of their work, were to be as those who, in both senses, were ministering spirits in heaven (Heb. i. 14). It helped also—and this may well have commended it—to bring the language of the Revelation into harmony with that of the great Apocalyptic work of the Old Testament, the prophecy of Daniel. On the other hand, we need not wonder that it did not take a prominent place in the vocabulary of the Church. The old associations of the word were too dominant, the difficulty of distinguishing the new from the old too great, to allow of its being generally accepted. It was enough that it answered, as now, a special purpose."[4]

[1] *Quis Div. Salv.?* 42, p. 959. [2] *Iren.*, iii. 3, 4.
[3] *Epist. of Ch. of Smyrna*, sec. 16. [4] Dean Plumptre, *Ep. to Seven Ch.*, p. 48.

The Date of the Apocalypse.

The traditional view as regards the date of the Apocalypse has been recently set aside by some, and a much earlier date assigned to it. But it is hardly safe, unless upon sufficient authority, to disturb those long-established bases upon which the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Scripture rest. The effect is to loosen the bond which unites us to them, to engender doubt, and to lead men to say: If there is uncertainty in such a plain matter as the date of authorship, what reliance can be placed in results which have been reached in matters of difficulty, where the data have been obscure or imperfect? German investigation has frequently outstepped the bounds of legitimate criticism; and by vain speculation, men of the nineteenth century pretend to be better informed as regards the time and place of the writing of a book of Holy Scripture than the Apostolic Fathers, and the other eminent theologians who lived in the early days of Christianity. Now as regards the time when the Revelation was written, it is contended that it was in the reign of Nero, A.D. 54–68, and that the banishment of St. John was contemporaneous with the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul; but has it never occurred to those who advocate an early date for the Revelation, that it could hardly be supposed Nero would put two Apostles to death, and permit a third to end his days in exile? Indeed, such a punishment as exile to Patmos was unknown in the time of Nero, nor is there any evidence to show that, except at Rome, any Christian suffered death during his reign.

St. Irenæus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, the actual disciple of St. John, affirms—and there is no reason to doubt his testimony—that the Apocalypse "was seen not so long ago, but almost in our generation, towards the close of the

reign of Domitian";[1] but we are told by Lützelberger, Renan, Baur, and others, that no value can be attached to any statement of Irenæus, because he held the tradition that Christ was fifty years old, and he asserted, on the authority of Papias, that our blessed Lord uttered a strange prediction, to the effect that "days shall come in which vines shall grow, of which each shall have ten thousand shoots," etc. When Irenæus, therefore, stated that St. John wrote the Apocalypse towards the end of the reign of Domitian, this statement is as destitute of historic authority as the other assertions are of truth, and that it goes for nothing. This inference, however, is scarcely justified; for his testimony as to the time of St. John's writing the Apocalypse is in regard to a matter of fact, while the other points to which exception has been taken are only matters of hearsay or tradition.

An attempt has been made to explain away the evidence of Irenæus, by making the word "Domitian" identical with *Domitius* Nero; but Tertullian, in writing on the same point, distinguishes clearly between Nero and Domitian, where he says, "Nero was the first Emperor who used the sword against the Church, and the next who imitated him was Domitian."[2] This distinction clearly shows that there was no such confusion of names as is alleged, and that it was therefore not Nero, who died A.D. 68, but Domitian, who died A.D. 96, that St. Irenæus alluded to.

But there is other testimony to the fact besides that of Irenæus. Clemens of Alexandria, who was contemporary with Irenæus, and who occupied a distinguished place in the Church towards the close of the second century, does not name the Emperor, it is true, by whom St. John was banished, but he says that, "after the death of the tyrant, John went from the island of Patmos to Ephesus"; and he adds that "John remained with the elders of Asia to the time of

[1] Iren, *adv. Hær.* v., 30, 3.

[2] Tertull., *Apol.*, 1, 6.

Trajan."[1] The tyrant alluded to here is obviously Domitian, whose cruelty was in no degree less than that of Nero; and the allusion to St. John continuing to live through Nerva's reign to the times of Trajan, is a strong presumption that it was not in the reign of Nero he was exiled to Patmos, but in that of the second persecutor of the Church, who, according to Tertullian, imitated Nero, namely Domitian.

By the time Domitian died, A.D. 96, we are told St. John would have been "too old to write the fiery pages of the Apocalypse." We are not to infer that it was *after the death* of the tyrant, but during St. John's exile in Patmos, in Domitian's lifetime, he wrote the Apocalypse. Besides, if his life was prolonged until the times of Trajan, we may suppose that, like Moses who had the vision of God, he who leant upon the Saviour's bosom may have been similarly sustained, so that "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Trajan came to the throne in A.D. 98, and he reigned nineteen years. We have further evidence from Victorinus, who suffered martyrdom, A.D. 303, and who not only affirms that St. John was in Patmos when "he saw the Apocalypse," but was banished there by Domitian, to work in the mines, and that after the assassination of the tyrant, he was released.[2] To this testimony may also be added that of Eusebius and St. Jerome, both of whom state that it was in the fourteenth year of the reign of Domitian, A.D. 95, when, in the isle of Patmos, through the persecution of Domitian, St. John wrote the Apocalypse.[3]

Surely in the face of this external evidence it is impossible to believe that an earlier date than the close of the first century could be assigned to the Revelation. But it is said that there is internal evidence which must go a long way

[1] Clem. Alex., *apud Euseb.*, iii. 23. [2] Victor., *in Apocal.*, x. 11.
[3] Jerome, *De Vir. Illust.*, 9. Euseb., *Chron.* and *H. E.*, iii. 18.

to demand an earlier date, and in fact make it absolutely necessary. The style of the Apocalypse is so poor, and the structure of the sentences in many cases so defective, that, when compared with the Gospel, it could scarcely be recognised as having been written by the same individual. The gospel shows an acquaintance with Hellenistic Greek, of which the Revelation gives not the faintest trace. How then, it is asked, if the Apocalypse was written in A.D. 95, could the writer in five years at most have made such progress in the acquisition of style and in the perfection of language, as to make the one book almost a contrast to the other? But do the facts justify the inference here drawn? It is admitted that the Gospel of St. John shows poverty of language and style in many respects as great as the Apocalypse. Tholuck, than whom no scholar was more competent to decide, alludes to the use of certain particles which are constantly repeated in St. John's Gospel, and he also speaks of barbarisms and solecisms, in various places; so that St. John is not to be regarded as such a practised and perfect writer, even when he wrote the Gospel; and, this being so, there would be no difficulty in his acquiring, in a very few years, such an improvement in style as the Gospel evinces when compared with the Apocalypse, instead of our supposing him to have spent twenty or thirty years in endeavouring to attain it. Even in the writings of St. Paul, the most highly educated and gifted of the Apostles, there are many deviations from pure classic style.

To fix the period of the Apocalypse in the time of Nero, or Galba, the conspirator, who hurled Nero from his throne, would be attended with insuperable difficulties.

(1) As has been already shown, it would be contrary to the voice of the early Apostolic Fathers, some of whom conversed with St. John, and the latest of whom were separated from the Apostle by only one generation, and who must,

therefore, have been in a better position to know the fact than we who are removed from him by 1800 years.

(2) If banished in the reign of Nero, he must then have been a resident in Rome; but there is no evidence to show that he was ever in Rome, and the Neronian persecution of Christians was altogether confined to those who were in the city. Had St. John been there, most probably he never would have seen Patmos, but must have endured the same kind of martyrdom which the other followers of Christ suffered at the hands of the tyrant Nero. There can be no doubt that St. John was residing at Ephesus for some considerable time, before "he became a dweller" in Patmos; but when he went to that city, there is no certain evidence. Probably he did not go to Ephesus until after St. Paul's martyrdom, which took place in either A.D. 67 (*Euseb.*), or 68 (*Jerome*). He was not there when St. Paul summoned the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus; nor have we any proof that he was there when St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians, or his two Epistles to Timothy, the second of which was written immediately before his death.

The Jewish war broke out about that time, and if St. John was then in Jerusalem, he may have gone to Asia Minor, especially as dangerous heresies prevailed there, and the presence of an Apostle was needful in order to counteract them and preserve purity of doctrine. Indeed, Jerome says, that owing to those heresies, St. John was urged by all the Asiatic bishops and deputations from many Churches to write respecting the Divinity of the Saviour.[1]

That he was in Asia Minor before being sent to Patmos is clear from the fact that those Fathers who have referred to his exile, speak of his *returning* to Ephesus. Irenæus for example says: "After the death of Domitian he *returned* from Patmos to Ephesus, where he lived to the reign of

[1] Hieron., *Præfat. in Matth.*

Trajan, and died at Ephesus in the sixty-eighth year after our Lord's Crucifixion."[1] So also Jerome: "When Domitian was slain and his decrees rescinded by the Senate, on account of his cruelty, John *returned* to Ephesus in the reign of Nerva."[2] Eusebius, following Irenæus, says that "the Apocalyptic vision was given to John at the end of the reign of Domitian;"[3] and Tertullian speaks of the Apostle having been cast into a vessel of boiling oil, by command of Domitian, and when taken out miraculously unhurt, having been banished to Patmos.[4]

If then St. John did not go to Ephesus until after the martyrdom of St. Paul, and if he was in Ephesus before being sent to Patmos, as the statements of Irenæus, Jerome, and others imply, it is obvious he could have neither been banished to that island, nor have written the Apocalypse, during the reign of Nero.

(3) But how can the statement of Irenæus, that, "when a boy (about A.D. 150), he had heard from the mouth of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and many other elders, many memorable things about John, the Lord's disciple, who, as a *successor* to St. Paul, lived in Ephesus, wrote the Revelation, and died at a great age in the reign of Trajan"[5]—be reconciled with St. John's banishment to Patmos in the reign of Claudius, Nero, or Galba?

(4) When St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians, which was during his first imprisonment in Rome, A.D. 61–63, that Church is spoken of in terms of the highest praise, and the Apostle "thanks God for their faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints" (i. 15). He speaks of them as "raised up and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—"built together for an habitation of God

[1] *Iren.*, ii. 22, 5.
[2] Hieron., *de Script Eccles.*, c. 10.
[3] Euseb., *Eccl. Hist.*, iii. 18.
[4] Tertul., *Præscr. adv. Hær.*, c. 36.
[5] *Euseb.*, v. 20, 24. Iren., *adv. Hær.*, iii. 3

through the spirit" (ii. 22); and it could hardly be supposed that, in the course of four or five years from that time, the Church at Ephesus should have sunk so low as it undoubtedly was when St. John wrote. *Nemo repente turpissimus* applies to Churches as well as individuals. If St. John wrote the Apocalypse in the reign of Nero, how was it that the Church presented such a contrast to what it had been a few years previously? This is wholly inexplicable. How can we account for the sudden departure from "first love"? Instead of the Church at Ephesus having "lost its first love," it was flourishing in the days of Nero, as Bishop Wordsworth well remarks, "in the first springtime of the gospel, which it had received from St. Paul."

(5) The Seven Churches were, when St. John wrote, not newly formed Churches, but had been for years in existence; they had become thoroughly organized and settled; they had suffered trial, and some of them fierce persecution; there had been at Pergamum one who is designated by the Lord Himself, "My faithful martyr" (Antipas), and who had nobly perished for the truth; there were heresies prevailing in some of the Churches to which St. John wrote, and which had not been known in the time of St. Paul, such as the Nicolaitan heresy, called also the "doctrine of Balaam," and the pernicious teachings of the woman (or "thy wife") Jezebel. Now if these Asiatic Churches were planted by St. Paul, some very considerable time must have passed before they could have arrived at the state in which they were when St. John addressed them. We know that Timothy was presiding over the Church at Ephesus at the time that St. Paul was about to suffer martyrdom; and how could St. John say then that he was "a companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," for we do not find any record of his having at that time been in any way associated with Ephesus, at least there is no mention of him by St. Paul in that con-

nection? We have no positive information as to the time when St. John left Jerusalem. No doubt he remained the *twelve years*, which tradition says Christ had told His disciples to stay in the Holy City after His ascension;[1] and we may be assured he continued to dwell there until after the death of Mary, the mother of our Lord, which took place A.D. 48.

We find SS. Peter, James and John, the Apostles of the Circumcision, associated together in Jerusalem, and present at the Council held there in A.D. 50; and as there is no record of St. John having left that city, he may have remained there for some years afterwards. It is probable he was temporarily absent in A.D. 62, when St. James was martyred by the rulers of the Jews, who were exasperated because, a year previously, St. Paul had escaped from their hands. Had St. John been then in the city, it could scarcely be supposed he should have been spared, as the rage and fanaticism that had spent their force in slaying one Apostle would not have been withdrawn or withheld in the case of another. Possibly between that time and the martyrdom of St. Paul, he was preparing to leave Jerusalem for ever; and the immediate necessity for his going to Asia Minor after St. Paul's death has already been shown.

That St. John did reside at Ephesus we have positive evidence furnished by Irenæus (iii. 3, 4), Clemens Alexandrinus (*Quis Div. Salv.*, c. 42), and Eusebius (*H. E.*, iii. 31); but we have no possibility of ascertaining the circumstances under which, or the exact time when, he removed to that city.

It has been said that the Apocalypse must have been written before the fall of Jerusalem, because in Rev. xi. 1, the writer speaks of "a reed" having been given to him, with directions "to rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." But in reply to this objection, the word, *ναὸς*, is never used, throughout the Epistles

[1] *Apollonius apud Euseb.*, H. E. V., 18.

or in the Book of the Revelation, to denote the literal temple, but it invariably applies to the Church of Christ (1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. ii. 21); and as the *measuring* here applies to the worshippers, as well as the temple, it must be interpreted in a spiritual sense, as descriptive of that preservation and protection which God has at all times bestowed on His Church, and the pledge of the perpetuity of which is contained in, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). There is no more reason for holding that the literal temple was then standing when St. John wrote the passage in Rev. xi. 1, than there is for believing that Jerusalem was standing when St. John wrote his Gospel, where he says (v. 2), "Now *there is* at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool," etc., the explanation of which statement is, that the pool remained after the city had been destroyed; for it is allowed by those who fix an early date for the Apocalypse, that the Gospel was written at a late period, long after the destruction of Jerusalem. See Westcott, *on St. John*, p. 87; *Early Days of Christianity*, vol. ii. p. 189.

Tertullian, alluding to the persecution of the Church at Pergamum, in which Antipas suffered, describes this persecution as having occurred during the time of Domitian; so that the end of the reign of that sanguinary monarch may be accepted as the time when the Revelation was "seen," as an earlier date would not accord with the condition of things which prevailed in the Asiatic Churches when St. John wrote.

"In these seven Epistles," says Wordsworth, "we see Churches settled with Angels, or Chief Pastors, at their head; we see that some years have elapsed since they were planted; that time has passed away in which they have been tried, and some have stood the trial, as Smyrna and Philadelphia; that some of them have declined from their primitive standard, as Ephesus, under fear of persecution, or, through worldliness and lukewarmness, as Laodicea; that others have a name

to live and are dead, as Sardis ; and that heresies have grown up amongst them, as at Thyatira ; and that they have been visited by forms of heretical pravity and moral libertinism, such as the doctrines and practice of the Nicolaitans and Judaizers, which were the scourges of the Asiatic Churches at that time."[1] Assuredly such a state of things as is here described could hardly find a place in a scheme that would connect the date of the Epistles to the Seven Churches with Nero's time; and, but for the gaining of an object, interpreters would never have thought of adopting such a date.

Three Classes of Interpreters.

There are three classes of interpreters ; the *Præterists*, who consider that all the Revelation has had its fulfilment, excepting, perhaps, the last four chapters ; the *Historical*, who regard the Revelation as a consecutive series of prophecies, the chief of which have been fulfilled, as shown by the testimony of history ; and the *Futurists*, who consider the entire book as prophecy yet to be fulfilled. The *Præterist* looks upon all that the Apocalypse contains as having had its fulfilment in primitive times ; first, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent dispersion of the Jewish race ; and secondly in the downfall of the Roman empire ; and hence the anxiety to fix an early date for the writing of this book. The interpreters of this class are generally confined to the Rationalistic School ; but their views are in direct contravention of the Fathers and the theological writers of the first six centuries, and utterly at variance with the whole course of Providence as developed in the history of the Church.

The Præterist view of the Apocalypse, is to regard it merely as "an inspired outline of contemporary history," and as referring to, and having had its fulfilment in, "events occurring in the sixth decade of the first century," which

[1] Bishop Wordsworth, *On the Rev.*, p. 158.

corresponds to the last days of the reign of Nero. These events were made known, we are told, by symbols presented to the eye of St. John, after the opening of seals, the sounding of trumpets, and the pouring out of vials.

The thing signified was the overthrow of the Jewish nation, the triumphs of Christianity over the Pagan power of Rome. Nero was the antichrist in St. John's day, just as Antiochus Epiphanes had been his prototype in the time of the Maccabees; and the only coming of Christ which was announced in the Revelation, had its fulfilment when that political judgment was inflicted upon the Jews in A.D. 70, by Titus Vespasian, which resulted in the burning of the Temple, the destruction of the city, and the complete dispersion of the Jewish race. Some writers on prophecy who have adopted the Præterist theory even allege that "the new heaven and the new earth" (Rev. xxi. 1), are to be understood as the happy state of the world after the destruction of Jerusalem,—seeming to forget the ten persecutions which began with Nero and ended with Diocletian. Now this may be New Testament exegesis, but it is, to say the least, *sui generis*. It yields but little deference to the voice of antiquity, to the teaching of the Church, and to the creeds and formularies of the Christian faith, which have been handed down from generation to generation as "forms of sound words" that we are to hold dear as life itself. Such interpretation of the Apocalypse savours somewhat of the secularism of the last times, when men will not endure sound doctrine, when "they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

If, for example, we take 2 Thess. ii. 8, and apply the principle of interpretation adopted by the Præterist to that passage, we must identify Nero with "the lawless one;" but in what way can we suppose he was destroyed by the manifestation of Christ's personal Presence, inasmuch as that

monster of cruelty perished by his own hand two years before Jerusalem's overthrow, March 19, A.D. 68 ?

Surely this is not the glorious Advent of Christ that we are taught to look for by our blessed Lord Himself, and by His Apostles. This could not be the hope which sustained the early Christians, and led them to glory in tribulations, in view of "the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Rather would such a view of our Lord's coming have had the tendency to extinguish Christian hope, to paralyse the grandest motives of the Christian life, and neutralize every noble effort in the cause of God. To think of Christ's Second Coming as past, reminds one of those mentioned by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy, "who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already ; and overthrow the faith of some." We might naturally expect to find amongst such a school of interpreters, Renan, and Baur, and Maurice, and Strauss, adapting Scripture prophecy to events occurring at the time when the predictions were written, and seeing only the circumstances and surroundings of the locality as affording an explanation of what was expressed in type or symbol ; but it could hardly be supposed that men who claim to be defenders of the faith, and who are recognised as such, would be associated with those whose teaching tends to loosen the fabric of Christianity and undermine the bulwarks of the Church.

Then on the other hand, what is to be thought of those who regard the existence of the Seven Churches as mythical, and deny a historical foundation to them ? No Churches actually existed, say they, and the various circumstances expressive of their spiritual condition were merely inserted to fill up the details of the story, parable, or myth, as the case might be. If this scheme had any pretext for its reception, the whole Bible would be a meaningless pageant, and our common sense would receive such a shock when we attempted to understand

it, that it would be utterly confounded. To be told there were no Churches in Asia Minor in St. John's time; no Epistles sent to them; no Angels or presidents over them, would be to ignore all history, to suspend all reason, and get transported into the shadowy region of a dreamy transcendentalism.

The Asiatic Churches, by whom Planted.

When, or by whom, the gospel was first introduced into Asia Minor, we have no distinct record. We read that amongst those who were at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, "dwellers in Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia," were present. We may, therefore, conjecture that many of the Jews of those countries, who had seen the wonders in the city on that day, would be led to believe the gospel, and carry back to their households tidings of the things they had seen and heard. But little effect was apparent before the first visit of St. Paul to those places. Indeed, the Asiatic Churches, of which the chief was Ephesus, we may regard as primarily having been planted by that Apostle. In Acts xviii., we find mention of St. Paul, accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla (A.D. 54), as having left Corinth—where his missionary exertions had been successful in the conversion to the faith, of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and where "many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized;" and we are told of his having sailed into Syria, and thence to Ephesus.[1] He left Aquila and Priscilla there, and after reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews, he sailed from Ephesus and landed at Cæsarea, on his way to Jerusalem. Then we find he went up and *saluted the Church*, and afterwards proceeded to Antioch. After spending some time there, we are informed "he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia, in order *strengthening all*

[1] Acts xviii. 19–24.

the disciples." From this, it appears that Christianity had existed in these quarters previous to St. Paul's first visit there. In Asia Minor both SS. Andrew and Philip had laboured; there it was Apollos joined Aquila and Priscilla; and the good work was carried on by these disciples, and afterwards by Tychicus.

St. Paul, on his second visit to Ephesus, remained there for three years;[1] and we may reasonably suppose he would, during that time, visit the cities which lay contiguous to that great commercial centre, and establish those Churches which, in after time, St. John was to have charge of, especially as it was not St. Paul's rule "to build upon another man's foundation."[2] St. Paul remained longer at Ephesus than he did at any of the other large cities where Churches were planted; and this accounts for the superior knowledge in the Divine mysteries of the gospel possessed by the Ephesians. He placed Timothy in charge of that Church, and in the Epistles which he addressed to him, he is styled the first Bishop of the Church of the Ephesians.

It is thought by some writers, that the Churches of Asia Minor were first planted by St. John. Their view is, that he remained at Jerusalem till after the death of the mother of our Lord, and then went to reside at Ephesus. It is certain that St. Paul finds him at Jerusalem on the occasion of his third journey there[3] (A.D. 52), although there is no mention of his having met him on his first journey.[4] The death of the mother of our Lord occurred, according to Eusebius, A.D. 48, so that St. John was still at Jerusalem four years after that event; and it is clear that St. John could not have been at Ephesus when St. Paul in A.D. 58 touched at Miletus, and sent for the presbyters of Ephesus to meet him there. We may, therefore, assume that, as has been already shown, not until after the martyrdom of St. Paul, did circumstances occur to induce St. John to direct his steps to those Asiatic

[1] Acts xix. 10. [2] Rom. xv. 20. [3] Gal. ii. 9. [4] Gal. i. 19.

Churches, which the former had founded; and if this view be correct, we may regard A.D. 66 or 67 as the year of St. John's removal from Jerusalem, and his entering upon the supervision and nurture of those Churches which occupied the greater portion of the latter years of his life.

The Character of the Writer.

Of all the disciples of our Lord, St. John stands pre-eminently exalted. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved. He was one of the three privileged to enjoy the closest intimacy with the Saviour. He leaned on His breast at the Paschal supper, and to him our Lord, when on the cross, committed His mother. We see a gentle affectionate disposition on the part of this Apostle, and yet an impulsiveness, and a susceptibility of sudden flashes of anger, which made the title *Boanerges* peculiarly appropriate to the sons of Zebedee.[1]

Not that righteous indignation against sin is not allowable, but our Lord showed that a spirit of severity belonged more to the Jewish code than the Christian. We see also no little ambition on the part of this disciple, and not a little pride of worldly distinction, in the early days of his discipleship; but grace takes the rough stone from the quarry, and hews and chisels it, and makes it meet to occupy a distinguished place in the Lord's temple. The Apostle St. John breathes love throughout all his writings, and this shows us that, in possessing and extolling a quality not naturally inherent in him, the Holy Spirit exerted that Divine influence upon him which qualified him not only for Apostleship, but for writing that portion of the New Testament which was to be the consummation of the Sacred Canon. Modern painters have given him a languid, soft, effeminate expression, as the type of his character; but more properly the eagle should be his symbol.

[1] Luke ix. 54.

Clemens of Alexandria records a touching story regarding him on his return from Patmos.[1] At one of the Churches he committed to the care of the bishop, a young man to whom he felt himself powerfully drawn, and one whom he considered well suited to the work of the ministry. The bishop received the young man, and promised to educate and watch over him, and do all in his power to prepare him for the course marked out by the Apostle. The youth, freed from restraint, became idle and dissolute, and at length renouncing all hope in the grace of God, he joined himself to a band of robbers, put himself at their head, and surpassed them all in cruelty and violence. Some time afterwards St. John visited the city, and after arranging some matters, he said to the bishop—"Well, bishop, restore the pledge which the Saviour and I entrusted to thee in the presence of the congregation!" The bishop was at first alarmed, supposing that St. John was charging him with misappropriating money that had been given to him. At length the Apostle said, "I demand again that young man and the soul of the brother." The old man sighed heavily, and with tears, replied: "He is dead!" "Dead?" said the disciple of the Lord. "In what way did he die?" "He is dead to God," responded the bishop. "He became godless, and finally a robber." The Apostle, with a loud cry, rent his clothing, and smote his head, and exclaimed—"To what a keeper have I committed my brother's soul?" Instantly he takes a horse and a guide, and hastens to the spot where the band of robbers was to be found. He is seized by their guard, he makes no attempt to escape, but cries out: "I have come for this very purpose; take me to your captain!"

Their captain completely armed is awaiting their arrival, but, recognising St. John as he approached, flees, from a

[1] *Quis Div. Salv.?* c. 42. The *Chron. Alexand.*, says the city, where this incident occurred, was Smyrna, and that Polycarp was the bishop.

sense of shame. St. John, nevertheless, forgetting his age, hastens after him with all speed, crying, "Why, my son, do you flee from me—from me your father, an unarmed old man? Have compassion on me, my son; do not be afraid. You yet have a hope of life. I will give account to Christ for you, should needs be. I will gladly die for you; Christ endured death for us. For thy sake I will give in ransom my own soul. Stop! believe! Christ hath sent me." Hearing these words, he first stands still, and casts his eyes upon the ground. He next throws away his arms, and begins to tremble and to weep bitterly. When the old man approached, he clasped his knees, and with the most vehement agony pleaded for forgiveness, baptizing himself anew, as it were, with his own tears. The Apostle finally led him back to the Church. Here he pleaded with him earnestly, strove with him in fasting, urged him with monitions, until he was able to restore him to the Church, an example of sincere repentance and genuine regeneration.

Polycarp records another incident of the beloved disciple, as presented to us as the Son of Thunder, in the fact of St. John having fled from a bath in which he found the heretic, Cerinthus, saying that he feared it would fall upon their heads.

And Jerome adds the following: "When St. John had reached his extremest old age, he became too feeble to walk to the meetings, and was carried to them by young men. He could no longer say much, but he constantly repeated the words, "Little children, love one another!" When he was asked why he constantly repeated this expression, his answer was, "Because this is the command of the Lord, and because enough is done if but this one thing be done."[1]

Nor do we lose sight of the well defined lines of character of this eagle-eyed disciple, in the scenes he witnessed, when he beheld those visions of God in the Isle of Patmos.

[1] Jerome, *Com. ad Galat.*, vi. 10, vol. iii. p. 314. "Filioli, diligite alterutrum —quia preceptum Domini est, et si solum fiat, sufficit."

The man who could calmly look on, when thunders were pealing, seals opening, when trumpets were shaking the solid earth and vials were being poured out with all their scathing violence, must have had courage of no ordinary character, faith to enable him to penetrate the dark cloud, and patience leading him to endure, and wait, and hope for the unveiling of the mystery. If St. Matthew, in the cherubic symbols of Ezekiel, might be represented by a *Lion*, as one who gives prominence to the royalty of Christ; if St. Mark may be fitly represented by a *Man*, to indicate the manner in which he sets forth the humanity of Christ; if St. Luke may be symbolized by an *Ox*, the animal used in sacrifices, inasmuch as the priesthood and propitiation of Christ are clearly defined in his Gospel, we may compare the beloved disciple to the *Eagle*, soaring towards heaven, teaching us to look upward, and gaze on the uncreated glory and splendour of our Divine Redeemer. He has drawn aside the veil which hides heaven's glories; he has opened up a vista, and enabled us to see unrolled by Him who is styled, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," the seven-sealed book of Prophecy and Providence, with all its dark secrets, with its deep impenetrable mysteries; and lest we should be doubtful or discouraged, he has given us a glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and which Christian faith and hope delight to contemplate.

St. John, the Amanuensis; Christ the Author of the Revelation.

It has been said, that if our Lord Jesus Christ intended that men should learn religion from a book, He Himself would have written that book, but that He wrote no part of the New Testament. Now the Book of the Revelation is strictly and properly that of which He has the claim to be the exalted Author. The book is called the Revelation of St. John, but

the first verse of the first chapter applies the authorship to Christ, *Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.* He speaks not by inspiration as the Apostles; but He, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," directly shows to His servant John those things which are contained in this book, embracing the things which were, when St. John wrote, and the things which were to be hereafter.

Christ told His disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." He gradually opened their understandings and hearts to receive the truth. During the great Forty Days, He was making known to them the things He had heard of His Father, and afterwards He sent His Holy Spirit "to show the Apostles things to come;" and now, to complete the revealed record, Christ discloses all that God had designed the Church should know in this dispensation, regarding the scheme of redemption. The thread of the Church's history is taken up here from the Acts of the Apostles, and as we read in that history of the planting and watering of Churches by the Apostles in various parts of the great Roman Empire, so here we get a glimpse of some of those Churches, half a century afterwards—whether faithful or faithless, whether maintaining first love or lukewarm, whether holding the truth or giving way to error, beacons to warn us of danger on the one hand, or to guide us safely to our destination on the other.

Then are we introduced to the Inner Sanctuary. We, who have been made acquainted with, and have been sharers in, the sufferings of Christ, are also permitted to see in symbol and in shadow the glory that is to be revealed—the closing scenes of this dispensation, and the dawn of that brighter and better day, which is to be ushered in by the actual manifestation of the Son of God in power and great glory.

THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR.

INSCRIPTION AND DOXOLOGY.

CHAP. I. 1–8.

1 Ἀποκαλύψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς, δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει· καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ,

2 Ὃς ἐμαρτύρησε τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδε.

3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων, καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα· ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ Ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος· καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ.

5 Καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς· τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς, καὶ λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ,

6 Καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν ἱερεῖς τῷ Θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.

7 Ἰδοὺ, ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς, καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν· καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. Ναὶ, ἀμήν.

8 Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Α καὶ τὸ Ω, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John:

2 Who bare witness of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* of all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne;

5 And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins by His blood.

6 And He made us to be a kingdom to be priests unto His God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold He cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him: and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over Him. Even so, Amen.

8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

INSCRIPTION AND DOXOLOGY.

CHAP. I. Ver. 1. *ἈΠΟΚΑΛΥΨΙΣ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.* The most ancient name of this book is the Apocalypse. St. Irenæus speaks of it as the Apocalypse which was seen of John. It is not "Revelations," but *the Revelation.* "John wrote it," says Bengel, "but Christ was its author." It means an "unveiling" of what had previously been covered. Now the future is in the hands of Christ, and in this book He has unveiled :—

(1) The condition and circumstances of the Seven Churches, and their subsequent defection and decay.

(2) He has opened the seven seals, and shown the Church's sorrows and sufferings, and her future triumphs and transports—a history from the First Advent to the general judgment.

(3) He has revealed the "time, times, and dividing of time" of Daniel,[1] and made them synchronize with the period of 1260 years, during which the Church of God should

[1] Dan. vii. 25.

suffer from antichristian power, until that power should ultimately be destroyed with the brightness of the Lord's coming.

(4) He has revealed the millennial glories of the Church during that period of a thousand years when Satan's power shall be overthrown, and when Christ shall "reign on Mount Zion and among His ancients gloriously."

(5) And, finally, he has told us of a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness shall exclusively dwell, the curse for ever removed, and the happiness and peace of primeval Eden restored—a city, too, needing no sun or moon to shine in it, but lighted up by the glory of God and the Lamb—"its walls salvation, its gates praise."

We have here a manual for Christians throughout all time, disclosing, step by step, the purposes of God to His Church in the world, all these culminating in the final overthrow of the power of darkness, and the erection of that kingdom which can never be moved. It is a fitting sequel to the inspired disclosures made to patriarchs and priests, prophets and apostles.

It stands as the top stone of a magnificent fabric to perpetuate the wisdom and skill, the power and love, of the Almighty Architect.

It presents to us a sublime panorama, having in its varied lines and shadows immortal conceptions, and betraying in all the hand of One who paints for eternity. It is an illuminated volume which, as time unrolls it, shall be read and remembered and revered by admiring ages for ever, as the record of God's goodness and mercy in the redemption of man, and his final restoration from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, which must shortly come to pass. These words, *ἐν τάχει*, seem to confound all our ideas of nearness as to time; for we are now fast approaching the

close of the nineteenth century and the things spoken of in this book have not yet fully come to pass.

There can be little doubt that many of the prophecies of Revelation have had their fulfilment, but there are many still unfulfilled. From the frequent use of this expression by the Apostles, there was an expectation that Christ's advent was then at hand, and the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written by St. Paul to remove that expectation. An event measured by a finite scale as distant would be near to an intellect that moves in a mightier orbit of thought, and gathers as into a point all the succession of human history. Our Lord did not gratify the disciples when they asked, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said: "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." If there is one thing that brings discredit on Christianity, it is pious dogmatizing; fixing those times and seasons which God has not been pleased to reveal. Interpreters of Scripture are not satisfied to adhere to the "sure word of prophecy," but they must themselves become prophets. They must be wise above what is written, and rashly fix dates for prophetic fulfilments; and sometimes these very men live to find their utterances contradicted by fact. Our aim should be not to speculate, but earnestly and soberly search and watch and wait for God's time. Like the wheels in Ezekiel's vision, when the spirit moved they moved, and when the spirit stood they stood—so should we; or to take another figure, we are not to go before the pillar of cloud or to lag behind, but to regulate our procedure by its movement. When our Lord has distinctly said: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father," it is our wisdom to be silent. It is no part of Christ's office to reveal it. The word *οἶδεν* in this passage means to deter-

mine, or to declare; for Christ, as God, knows all that the Father knows, inasmuch as in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; but it has been His will and pleasure to conceal as well as reveal, thereby teaching us to exercise faith and hope, and wait patiently until the light of eternity, if need be, will render luminous the darkness of time.

"The things that were shortly to come to pass" were given by distinct revelation from Christ; and human calculations are all vain conjectures. We are told, for example, that the measurements of the Great Pyramid at Memphis exactly correspond to certain fixed periods of Biblical chronology! If this be so, then the things which "no man knoweth," are so clearly made known that they are demonstrated by mathematical precision! In that case the Pharaohs and Ptolemies of Egypt who built that pyramid must have had a special revelation, and a knowledge of facts of which we are ignorant, and must be ignorant, because Christ has willed it to be so. Such statements as those marking a connection between things that are utterly opposed to one another, or at least that have no affinity, are mere puerile trifling. Better to be contented with what we know, and not pry into secrets which lie beyond us. To do so is like lifting the lid of the ark and looking in, for which act the men of Bethshemesh perished. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever" (Deut. xxix. 29).

καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John. The word "it" is not in the original, and it may either be taken absolutely as referring to the revelation, or it may be applied to *ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι,* in which case the word supplied should be "them." The manner

of making known to St. John the things that must shortly come to pass was "by His angel." This shows us that angels are in Christ's hands, and under His authority. We read that the "law was given by the disposition of angels." "The word spoken by angels" is placed in contrast with the word spoken in these last days by the Son of God; so that angels have, from the earliest times, occupied an important place in the communications of God's revealed will.

In this book we do not find the angel making known anything to the Apostle before chap. xvii. 1. In chap. vi. 1, one of the four living creatures calls upon St. John to "come and see"; and in chap. vii. 13 one of the elders gives him the necessary information; but there is little to be gathered from the book as to what was communicated to St. John by the angel, or how this was done. As symbolic representations may be supposed to have passed before the Apostle, perhaps the angel may have made known their meaning, although we have no direct proof as to whether St. John knew what these symbols which he saw signified. We know that much of what was written by the Apostles was enigmatical to themselves. They prophesied, but knew not the interpretation of their own prophecies (1 Pet. i. 10–12); and we may therefore conceive that the office of the angel was to present the symbols before the mind of St. John, so as to enable him to record them. In the administration of Providence angels are employed for carrying out God's purposes, and in the affairs of grace they exert a moral and spiritual influence for good upon the minds of God's people. They are ministering spirits waiting to bring support and relief to His servants under every pressure. "The angel of the Lord encamps around them that fear Him." We may therefore understand how they have been employed in making known the manifold wisdom of God, in the revelation of His will.

τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, *to His servant John.* He does not call himself an Apostle, and it has been contended that the Book of Revelation was not the work of St. John. But if this argument has any weight, St. James's Epistle and St. Jude's would both be wanting in authenticity and genuineness, because the writer of each does not style himself an Apostle. St. John remembered the words of his Master: "The servant is not greater than his Lord"; and although he was permitted to possess the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and speak with the tongue of angels, he was not exalted above measure by the abundance of his revelations, but possessed that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in God's sight inestimably precious. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, calls himself "a servant of Jesus Christ." Was he less an Apostle, or was his Epistle less genuine, because he adopted this style of expression?

Ver. 2. ὃς ἐμαρτύρησε τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδε, *who bare witness of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw.* In Acts i. 8 we find our Lord told His disciples, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." Others may bear witness respecting the works of Christ, but ye shall bear witness of His person as the Son of God. Here St. John speaks of his own witness-bearing. This expression is one in frequent use by St. John (1 John i. 2; iv. 14). But what does he mean to convey by it here? Vitringa thinks reference is made to the Gospel which had already been written by St. John; but from the style of the writer, and his familiarity with Hellenistic Greek, it is considered that the Gospel was written subsequently to the Apocalypse. May not his witness-bearing here refer to the testimony he had borne to the Word of God, whether in teaching or otherwise, and for which he was then an exile? All the other books of the New Testament had already been written. The three Gospels had entered into

an historic detail of our Lord's works—His life, death, and resurrection ; but none of them had sufficiently dwelt on the Divine side of Christ's character, and we may regard St. John as prominently proclaiming Christ as "the true God and eternal life." Augustine says of St. John : "He speaks of the Divinity of our Lord as no other person has spoken. He pours forth that into which he had drunk. For not without a reason is it mentioned in his own Gospel that at the feast he reclined upon the bosom of his Lord. From that bosom he had in secrecy drunk in the stream, but what he drank in secret he poured forth openly."[1] And Origen, speaking of the Gospel which St. John wrote, observes : "As the Gospels are the first-fruits of all the Scriptures, the first-fruits of the Gospels is that of St. John, into whose meaning no man can enter unless he has reclined upon the bosom of Jesus."

Nowhere can we see moral beauty so well delineated as in St. John's testimony of Christ's character ; and that moral beauty has such a constraining effect as to compel the admiration of the world. The Gentile might see in the outer world the marks of a Divine hand, the Jew might behold God clothed in majesty—"His pavilion round about Him dark waters, and thick clouds of the sky" ; but to us Christ is the personal manifestation of the Divine character. Here "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Even to those who are strangers to the truth, there is something in the character of Christ so ineffably sublime and attractive that they are compelled to say, "Never man spake like this Man." "Go to your natural religion,"—says Bishop Sherlock, contrasting Christ with the founder of the Mahometan faith,—"lay before her Mahomet and his disciples arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands, and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious sword ; show her the

[1] Aug., *Tract.* 36 *in Joan.*

cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements; show her the prophet's chamber, his concubines and wives, and hear him allege revelation to justify his lust and oppression. When she is tired with this prospect, then show her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and perverse; let her see Him in His most retired privacy; let her follow Him to the mountain, and hear His devotions and supplications to God; carry her to His table to see His poor fare, and hear His heavenly discourses; let her see Him injured, but not provoked; let her attend Him to the tribunals, and consider the patience with which He endured the scoffs and reproaches of His enemies. Lead her to His cross, and let her view Him in the agony of death, and hear His last prayer for His persecutors: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' When natural religion has seen both, ask which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had. When she saw part of His scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the cross, by him she spake and said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'"[1] Contrasting Christ with Socrates—Rousseau says: "If the life and death of Socrates be the life and death of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God." How shall we account for that beauty of character which the very enemies of our Lord admit? If Christ be not Divine, then we must reject it as the baseless fabric of a vision.

καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ. St. John not only was a witness-bearer of the Word of God, but of the testimony of Jesus Christ; namely, of the testimony which Christ bore to the truth. This clearly

[1] Sherlock's *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 271.

shows that our Lord was a witness. In Rev. iii. 14, He is called "the faithful and true Witness." Christ bore witness to the Old Testament Scriptures. He testified to man's condition and destiny, and by His resurrection opened up to those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage, the joys and hopes of a bright and glorious immortality. St. John was one of the privileged Apostles, and he had frequent opportunities of hearing from the lips of Christ those teachings in which, whether in the world at large, in the Jewish synagogue, or before Pontius Pilate, Christ witnessed a good confession ; and he alone of all the Apostles has frequently referred to this. For example, John viii. 18 : "I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me." John xviii. 37 : "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." St. John then means to convey to us that he was a witness of Christ's faithful testimony to the truth as connected with those great eternal realities which He came to reveal to man.

ὅσα εἶδε, *of all things that he saw.* He did not record what was merely the product of his own imagination, but the things which God showed to him. "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man"—and so here what he saw was the direct and infallible revelation of Jesus Christ.

Ver. 3. *Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων, καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας, καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα· ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein : for the time is at hand.* The allusion is here to a public reader, whose office it was to read aloud for the benefit of the audience, as was done in Eastern countries before the art of printing was discovered, and when books written on parchment rolls were the only source of

information available, apart from that of *vivâ voce* teaching. The blessing here applies both to the reader and hearer; and we have therefore a very strong argument against those who say that the prophetic portions of Scripture should not be studied, because unprofitable. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," etc. (2 Tim. iii. 16). There are three words here, "read," "hear," "keep," which show that this book was not merely to be read, but studied, so as to ascertain, in so far as it is given to man to understand, the development of prophecy; and, in the exercise of this investigation, the student would derive such benefit as would guard him against coming dangers, and thus prove a blessing to him. The word, ἀκούοντες, here takes an accusative case after it, and is to be rendered, not as denoting the hearing of the ear, but the understanding of the mind and heart.

When a genitive follows, it is to be construed in the sense of simply hearing with the ear; when an accusative, in that of understanding. This distinction is shown in Acts ix. 7, where we read, the men that journeyed with St. Paul stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. The words are, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς, showing that they merely heard with the hearing of the ear. If we compare this with Acts xxii. 9, where we have an account of St. Paul's speech to the Jews at Jerusalem, in which he rehearses his conversion, we read: τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι, *but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me.* It might be supposed there was a contradiction, but this is not so, for the word ἤκουσαν, is here to be taken in the sense of *understand, i.e.* they understood not the voice of Him that spake to me. So the blessing in Rev. i. 3, is not merely to those who listen to the public reading of the book, but who exercise their understandings upon it, and observe the

things written therein. It is not enough to be hearers of the word, but we must also be doers of it (Jas. i. 18). Our Lord, in the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, has forcibly illustrated this by the parable of the two builders. Many of the Jews in our Lord's time were relying upon their descent from Abraham—"We have Abraham to our Father"—and considered the knowledge of the law was all that was necessary in order to secure their salvation, just as the Gnostic teachers taught that a bare knowledge of God was all that was required. Alluding to these, Justin Martyr says:[1] "Ye deceive yourselves, and such souls as are like you, who say that although they are sinners, and if they have knowledge of God, God will not count their sin to be sin." There is in Scripture what no other book can give us. As St. Augustine says: "It is a long letter sent to us from our heavenly country." Its design is to unveil God to us as a living, active, moral Being, who knows our wants and will supply them—who gradually manifested Himself to our race, and, in the person of Jesus Christ, has intervened to deliver us from our bondage of sin, and make us heirs of glory. It is therefore the duty—not only so, but the blessedness, the happiness, the comfort, of all to read that book, and to ascertain what it says to each of us. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope."

ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, *for the time is at hand.* The time is near when these things which have been disclosed in this book will come to pass (see ver. 1); *near*, in Divine computation, although remote in human reckoning, for one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. There is a gradual development in the prophecies of Revelation—some of them were near as regards their fulfil-

[1] *C. Tryph.*, p. 370.

ment, while others extended far into the future; but, in any case, near, when time is compared with eternity. Judgment, in accordance with our Lord's prediction, had fallen upon the Jewish nation for the sin of its rulers, and upon their temple *Ichabod* was inscribed. "One stone was not left upon another that had not been thrown down."[1] The Church of Christ had to encounter persecution, and the assaults of false teachers bringing in heresies, were not the least of the trials she had to meet. These were foreseen by Him who sees the end from the beginning; and as the seven-sealed book was unrolled, these visions of the future were developed, and now have their manifestation in the light of history. The gradual unfolding of prophecy, therefore, was designed to support our faith by giving us clear and distinct views of the final triumph of the Church over all her enemies, and the ultimate advancement and consummation of the kingdom of God's dear Son, and the opening up to the eyes of the enlightened understanding that glorious world where faith shall be exchanged for vision, and hope merge into eternal joy.

Ver. 4. *Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν, καὶ ὁ ἦν, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος· καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace unto you, and peace from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne.* In this address, or inscription, St. John speaks of himself as the author or writer of this book. The style he adopts in this address is peculiar. He speaks of himself as JOHN. Now there could be no difficulty in ascertaining who was meant by this name. He was the only one of the twelve Apostles then living, and no individual except himself could properly make use of such a mode of prefacing what he was about to write.

[1] See Joseph., *de Bell. Jud.*, lib. 7, cap. 8, sect. 7.

He does not call himself an Apostle, as St. Peter and St. Paul, at the commencement of their Epistles, nor does he, in any way, afford evidence of his identity as the last surviving Apostle. Like St. James, in ver. 1, he is described as the Lord's servant, John. In the title of the book he is styled John the Divine, ὁ θεολόγος, but this title was given him by the Fathers because, more than any other of the inspired writers of the New Testament, he discussed the sublime mysteries of Christian theology, and particularly asserted and enforced the doctrine of Christ's divinity.[1] Irenæus, who was brought up under the ministry of Polycarp, who was contemporary with the Apostle St. John, in many instances ascribes this book to "St. John, the Evangelist, the Disciple of the Lord, that John who leaned on the Lord's breast at the last supper":[2] and Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was privileged to converse with, and to be a disciple of, St. John, begins the solemn prayer which he uttered at the stake, when about to seal by martyrdom the testimony which he held, with the words of Rev. xi. 17: *Κύριε, ὁ Θεὸς, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.*

ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, *to the seven Churches which are in Asia.* The "Asia" here mentioned was strictly what was known by Proconsular Asia, and embraced the two divisions of Ionia and Lydia. Its capital was Ephesus, where, we are informed, St. John lived after his return from exile, and wrote his Gospel, and died. "After the death of Domitian, he returned from Patmos to Ephesus, where he lived to the reign of Trajan, and died at Ephesus in the sixty-eighth year after our Lord's crucifixion."[3]

That these seven Churches were neither the whole of the Churches of the district, nor in some respects the most influential, we have evidence to show. At Colossæ, Hiera-

[1] *McLeod on Rev.*, lect. ii. p. 21. [2] *Iren.*, lib. iv. p. 330.
[3] *Iren.*, ii. 22. *Euseb.*, iii. 23.

polis, Magnesia, and Tralles, there were Churches; but these were unnoticed in the messages conveyed to the Asiatic Churches. The number *seven* denotes totality, universality, completeness, and therefore the messages sent to the seven were designed for the edification of all Churches in every age. This is clearly seen from the concluding words of each message: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." There is no number of such frequent occurrence in the Revelation as *seven*. We have seven seals, seven candlesticks, seven trumpets, seven spirits, seven vials, etc., and as it is the number denoting perfection or completeness, we may look upon the seven Churches as types of the Christian Church of all ages unto the end of time. If the Epistles written by other Apostles to particular Churches were designed for general application, it could hardly be supposed that these should be limited, because whatever has been written for encouragement or warning, for approval or condemnation, for instruction or discipline, is adapted to all others under the same circumstances. These Churches illustrate doctrine, they inculcate obedience now as well as in the first or second century; and in this respect they have a prospective reference. But it should never be supposed that these Churches were so many allegorical representations of successive stages of Christendom. This would be to confound history with allegory; and distinctly "the things that are" are marked by a line of demarcation broad enough for all purposes from "the things that shall be hereafter." The prophetic part of Revelation does not commence till the beginning of the fourth chapter; and therefore all that is addressed to these Churches is historic narrative.

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν, καὶ ὁ ἦν, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, Grace unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come. This is the usual salutation in all

the Apostolic Epistles, except in those of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus, in which ἔλεος, *mercy*, is placed between "grace and peace." It has been observed by Wordsworth that Χάρις, *grace*, was the Greek form of social greeting (χαίρειν), and Εἰρήνη, peace, the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*), and that St. John elevates and spiritualizes, consecrates and Christianizes, the Greek and Hebrew forms of social salutation, and gives an Apostolic greeting to the world. How different is this from the conventional mode of salutation amongst us—worldly prosperity, health, happiness, and the expression of our good wishes for each other. St. John in his Epistle to the well-beloved Gaius, conveys the same idea as he has here expressed: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). He desired for him worldly prosperity in the ratio of his soul's prosperity. Generally we read the Apostle's good wish backwards: Get worldly advantage at any cost, and, like Lot, choose the well watered plains of Sodom, even at the risk of losing the soul! Grace is the free favour of God, and peace is the result of it. Every good and perfect gift that we receive is of God's grace; and St. Jerome makes use of the frequent Apostolic salutation as an argument against the Pelagians, when he says: "St. Paul, who was more eminent in labours than the rest of the Apostles, is a signal example of humility, ascribing all his powers to Divine grace."[1] Grace is designed to bestow upon us the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ in our salvation; and, when that grace has been conveyed to the soul of a sinner, it issues in his justification, and peace is the fruit which follows.

ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν, καὶ ὁ ἦν, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, *from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come.* These words are a paraphrase of the Hebrew יְהוָה, Jehovah, and the fact of the participles not having been declined, as the name Jehovah was not, would

[1] Jerome, *adv. Pelag.*, Dial. ii. p. 515.

indicate that God, the self-existent One, was unchangeable—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and what greater source of consolation to the suffering Christian than to know that the Being on whom he is relying changes not—that He "rests in His love." To Moses in the wilderness God revealed Himself, Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν, *I am the Existing One:* and the salutation of this passage resembles that description which God gave of Himself. The Jerusalem Targum renders the expression *I am that I am* by the very words before us, "who was, is, and shall be."[1]

It may be observed that the word ἐρχόμενος is the key-note of Revelation. It runs like a silver thread through the entire book. It enters into it at the beginning, and it is summed up at the end by "Surely I come quickly." All its teachings, warnings, hopes, and promises, point to this grand event, and it is with precision and point well designated the Book of the Second Advent.

καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, *and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne.* The Holy Spirit in His sevenfold operations and gifts: one in essence, but sevenfold in influence; or as the number *seven* is that which marks perfection, the Holy Spirit in His complete and perfect energy—must be here understood. Here the blessings of grace and peace are traced to a Triune God. It has been thought by some that "the seven Spirits before the throne" are seven angels which stand in God's presence, as the Jews were of opinion that as seven princes stood in the Persian court before the king, angels occupied a like position in heaven. In the apocryphal Books of Tobit (xii. 15) and Enoch (xx.) seven holy angels are represented as

[1] Plumptre, *Ep. to Seven Churches*, p. 13, quotes the inscription in the temple of Athene (the Egyptian Isis) at Sais, alluded to by Plutarch, as bearing a striking similarity to this Divine Name: Ἐγώ εἰμι πᾶν τὸ γεγονὸς, καὶ ὂν, καὶ ἐσόμενον, *I am all that has come into being, and that which is, and that which shall be,* and to this is added, "and no man hath lifted my veil."

"watching, presenting the prayers of saints, and going in and out before the glory of God." But surely there would be a gross incongruity in placing any created being on a level with the absolute and eternal God, and more so in supposing that St. John would invoke grace and peace from any but God. It is true that God in the administration of His providence and grace makes use of angels in carrying out His purposes; but we may not, under the pretence of voluntary humility that man in his fallen state needs the mediation of angels, worship or invoke them, which is strictly forbidden (Col. ii. 18; Rev. xix. 10). In the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews, he shows, in chap. i., that Christ is pre-eminently above angels, which are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation," and that His dignity is lowered by our yielding homage to those who are merely His servants. When in early times false teachers, such as Cerinthus and the Ebionites, introduced angel worship into their systems, they were condemned by the Church; and specially was the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363) convened for repressing, among other things, the errors of angel worship, which council decreed that "Christians may not leave the Church of God, and go away and invoke the names of angels: and let such persons be anathema, for they desert our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God."[1] Can it be supposed, therefore, that St. John would couple angels with God the Father and God the Son, omitting all reference to the Holy Spirit, as the source of grace and peace? Besides, angels are never called "spirits" in the Apocalypse. The words "who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire" (Ps. civ. 4), have no reference to the *nature* of angels, but to the mode of their agency in the natural world, when employed by God as His messengers. "Who maketh His angels to be winds, and His ministers to

[1] Labb., *Conc.*, i. 1530, sq. ed. Coleti.

be a flame of fire," is the correct rendering of that passage. God makes use of them as His servants; and they are all standing to do His high behests. In Rev. iii. 1, our Lord is said, "to have the seven Spirits of God," *i.e.* all the fulness of the Holy Spirit that rests on Him (Isa. lxi. 1; Luke iv. 18). Now if by these Spirits we were to understand "angels," what meaning would be conveyed? What distinction to Christ to hold the angels in His hand, as He was Lord of all creation? It would be a mere truism which would have no connection whatever with the circumstances of the Church addressed. In the words, therefore, which we have been considering, it is no created being that is brought before us, placed on the same level with the Almighty, but it is He who inspired the Psalmist to write of the Son of God before He came into the world, "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

Ver. 5. *καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς· τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins by His blood.* Christ is called the "faithful witness." He came from the bosom of the Father to make known His will, and as a prophet to instruct His Church. Never should we have known the true and perfect character of God but for Christ. "The only begotten Son, He hath declared Him." The light of nature was insufficient to disclose the character of God to mankind. It had been tried and was found wanting. The world by wisdom knew not God.

How sad the condition of the heathen world when Plato addressing the Athenians said: "Unless God in pity send an instructor, we must continue in a state of sleep for ever." Christ's Sermon on the Mount dispelled the false teaching of

the Jewish Rabbis, and removed the mists of barren antinomianism which had settled upon the Jewish mind, while His consistent life of conformity to His Father's will, and His uplifted Cross, testified to the world how God could be just and the justifier of all who would receive and believe on His Son. With what faithfulness has our blessed Lord witnessed to the moral condition of man and his destiny. How fully He has answered the problems of human life: Whence came I? What am I? Whither am I going? and but for which answers these difficulties should have remained for ever unsolved. Richard of St. Victor, as quoted by Trench, has beautifully alluded to Christ as the faithful witness in these terms: "He was the faithful witness, because all things that He heard of the Father He faithfully made known to His disciples. Because He taught the way of God in truth, and cared not for man, nor regarded the persons of men. Because the truth which He taught in words He confirmed in miracles. Because the testimony to Himself on the part of the Father He denied not even in death. And because He will give true testimony of the works of good and bad at the Day of Judgment." There is a peculiar construction of the words *ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς*, where the words which are in apposition are in different cases. Critics have supposed that the structure of such phrases shows the Apostle's deficiency in the knowledge of the Greek language, never for a moment considering whether there was a design on the part of the inspired writer in such departures from the ordinary rules of grammar. In Verse 4, we have had occasion to notice this already in connection with the names of God, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning; and Bishop Wordsworth well observes on this point that these remarkable structures which, by their singularity, attract the reader's attention, serve as mementos that the truths which they express transcend the reach of human thought and language.

ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, the first born of the dead. This designation peculiarly belongs to Christ. He was the first raised from the dead never to die again. He had raised others —Jairus' daughter, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus —but all these were restored to life by Him who is the Prince of Life, only to die again. But Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. He was the Firstfruits of them that slept. As the firstfruits of the barley harvest were taken into the temple and presented as a wave offering before the Lord, the pledge of the coming harvest; so Christ was the Firstfruits from the grave, the earnest, and pledge, and pattern of that future resurrection to which the Church of God in every age has been looking forward in anxious expectation. He was the first who could say, "O grave, where is thy victory?" His primogeniture is threefold: (1) From eternity he was the first begotten of the Father. (2) When He was born at Bethlehem, He was the firstborn son of Mary. (3) And here He is by His glorious Resurrection proclaimed the Firstborn of the dead —the Son of God with power; and, in virtue of His being the Firstborn of the dead, He is the source of that spiritual life by which the new creation is quickened and sustained. Hence He is the Head of the Church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. In the expression, *πρωτότοκος*, we see One who, by His resurrection, carried life into the chambers of the dead; for, on the morning of the resurrection, many saints which slept arose, and formed the vanguard of His mighty train. He was *πρωτότοκος*, because He was the first to arise by His own power. He had said, "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again." In all who returned to life before our Lord's resurrection, life was not merely resumed, but restored; it was given back, not taken. He had laid it down voluntarily, and now He takes it again. He is *πρωτότκοος*, because He

has taken precedence of His people who shall at His summons rise from the dead : "Because I live, ye shall live also." He is the harbinger of our resurrection, the Elder Brother of the family that no man could number, redeemed out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue—countless as the sand on the seashore, bright and varied as the myriad stars which light up the dome of heaven. Blessed day when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality ; and when shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory"!

καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, *and the ruler of the kings of the earth.* When our Lord had achieved the victory over death, He proclaimed Himself as having all power in heaven and on earth. When He had endured the cross, despising the the shame, God highly exalted Him. His triumphs were the reward of His humiliation. These are and have been apparent in the history of His Church for nineteen centuries ; nor are His conquests ended. "His name shall endure for ever ; it shall be lasting as the sun ; men shall be blessed in Him ; all nations shall call Him blessed." Voltaire said he lived in the twilight of Christianity, meaning that it should soon die out in endless night ; but it was the twilight before the dawn of a yet brighter and more glorious day than ever the world saw : that day when the Prince of the kings of the earth shall be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. "The kings of the earth have set themselves, and the rulers have taken counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, but He that sits in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision." There need be no fear of the Gospel failing in success, or being driven back to the shores of Gennesaret. It has had opponents in the past, as it has enemies now ; but it has gone forward in its march of conquest from victory to victory, and will not cease until He, whose right it is to take the kingdom to Himself and reign, shall come with power and

great glory. Religions have risen in opposition to the religion of the Cross, but they have become feeble and effete, while Christianity is yet young, because her Author lives, and "has still the dew of His youth." Empires rise and fall, kingdoms fade and perish, but the kingdom of Christ, which is the Church, can never be moved, for He is in the midst of her, and He shall help her and that right early. "By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice." Every event occurring around us is only the forerunner of the overthrow, the final overthrow, of the powers of darkness, the unbolting of the bars of the prison of bondage and corruption, and the delivering of groaning creation from the curse, and the ushering in of the joyous Advent when, as amid the voice of many waters and the voice of mighty thunderings, shall the welcome of the countless multitude of the ransomed of the Lord be heard, saying, "Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. xix. 6, 19–21).

τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λούσαντι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins by His blood. The participle, *ἀγαπῶντι*, is the present tense, and conveys to us the idea of a perpetual love. Those whom He once loves He loves to the end. "Who can separate us from the love of Christ?" Certainly nothing external to us, but we must exercise vigilance and prayer, lest the enemy of souls get an advantage over us. While Christ alone can keep us from falling, we are told to keep ourselves in the love of God.[1] It is needful both to believe as if Christ did all, and to work as if we ourselves did all in the matter of our salvation. Our love to Christ springs from His love to us; and if the love of Christ, even to His death for us on the Cross, does not constrain us to give ourselves—our souls and bodies—as a living sacrifice to Him, nothing else can. Christ is the exponent of the Father's love,

[1] Jude 21.

not the procuring cause of it. It was not that God did not love us, and that Christ came and removed the hindrances; for the heart of God was not turned away from His wayward children; but Christ's coming into the world was a proof of the love of God: so that we may well say with the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. xi. 33).

καὶ λούσαντι ἡμᾶς, κ.τ.λ., *and washed us from our sins by His blood.* There is another reading here, λύσαντι, instead of λούσαντι, and it is difficult to know which is the correct one, as there are many authorities for both. The sense, however, is not affected in either case, for the proof of Christ's love to us was His redeeming us by washing away our sins by His blood. We were in bondage, sold under sin, and Christ's blood was the price of our redemption. By its being shed on the Cross, there is deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. xx. 28). The connection, however, would lead us to prefer λούσαντι, *who washed us*, especially as the words which follow, *and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father*, convey the idea of ablution rather than that of releasing as from bondage. Under the Jewish law it was necessary, before the priest put on his holy garments, as they were called, to wash himself, indicating that he who undertakes so sacred an office must be pure and holy. In the same way, those whom our Lord makes priests and kings, before attaining to that high honour, must have their sins washed away by His blood. It is at the same time, quite true that the image of releasing us from our sins is as frequently employed in Scripture as washing us, and

Christ is often spoken of as a λύτρον. In 1 Peter i. 18, it is thus used: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, etc:" so in 1 Tim. ii. 6, Christ is spoken of as having "given Himself a ransom (λύτρον) for all, to be testified in due time." See also Acts xx. 28; Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14. The Vulgate version has—*et lavit nos*; so has also the Vatican, λούσαντι, *who washed us*, while the Alexandrine, the Sinaitic, and the Codex Ephraem Syri rescriptus, and others of lesser note, have λύσαντι, *who released us*. The washing us from our sins by His blood implies an atonement. Under the law, without shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin; hence the sacrifices wherein the life of the victim was taken away were propitiatory. Now Christ, by shedding His blood upon the Cross, made an expiation for sin: He gave His life for ours; He died the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. He was our substitute—He stood in our place—He took our sins upon Him—"He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." And as He took our sins away by His meritorious death upon the Cross, He makes us righteous by His righteousness imputed to us and received by faith. The doctrine of an atonement for sin is thus clearly established and in virtue of that atonement we are washed from our sins by His blood. Tell us not then that the death of Christ was that merely of a martyr, a spectacle before men and angels of the dignity of self-sacrifice—that it was intended to reconcile man to God by preaching to us, through a mortal, the evil of sin and the majesty of sorrow! What meant that agony in Gethsemane, that conflict with the powers of darkness, that bitter cup which, for the moment, He prayed, if it were possible, His Father might permit to pass from Him? There, there was no audience to teach, nor any spectacle to exhibit. To die for us men and for our salvation was the object of His life; and in view of that being

accomplished He said in His intercessory prayer: "Father, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." How could such words as these which we have in this passage be applied to a mere mortal—"Unto Him who loveth us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood"? Could they be used in reference to St. Peter or St. Paul, when they endured the martyr's cross, on their way to the martyr crown? or to Polycarp, or Ignatius, or Antipas, the faithful martyrs? Impossible. The martyrs' blood could not wash the stain of sin from their own souls. No man could redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him. Each must own, "Jesus Christ is my Redeemer." And the theme of rejoicing through eternity will be this grand fact, that Christ has washed us from our sins in His own blood. When one of the elders asked the Seer of Patmos, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" and when St. John replied: "My Lord, thou knowest," the answer came: "These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God" (Rev. vii. 13–15).

Ver. 6. *καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν ἱερεῖς τῷ Θεῷ καὶ Πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα, καὶ τὸ κράτος, εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν, and He made us to be a kingdom to be priests unto His God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* Here the abstract word, *βασίλειαν, kingdom*, is put for the concrete *βασιλεῖς, kings*, and this in the most ancient MSS. The Vulgate reads, "Et fecit nos regnum." The meaning, however, is unchanged. It corresponds exactly to what is expressed in 1 Pet. ii. 9, "Ye are a chosen generation, *βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, a royal priesthood.*" Ye who are Christ's are in the enjoyment of all the privileges and prerogatives of God's chosen people as promised in former times; ye are a

royal priesthood, or a kingdom of priests unto God, because you are in union with Him who is your Head, Christ Jesus, who is a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek. Here every believer in Christ is in a certain sense a priest, because he offers spiritual sacrifices. He presents himself, his soul and body, as a living sacrifice to his Redeemer (Rom. xii. 1). He offers the sacrifice of praise continually, the fruit of lips which make confession to His name (Heb. xiii. 15). And in the exercise of prayer he is offering a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. ii. 16). If then every Christian believer is a priest, what need of a Christian ministry? If all the world were really converted unto God, there would be no need of the special and distinctive office of the Christian ministry. It will be so in heaven, for in Rev. xxi. 22, we read, "And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." But while here it is otherwise. Christ gave the gifts of the Holy Ghost to His Church, and "He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ," etc. (Eph. iv. 11). Here the Apostle shows that it was Christ's own appointment to have divers orders and degrees in the Church, so as to promote spiritual life and growth in faith and knowledge. Christ gave not all, but *some* to be Apostles, and in 1 Cor. xii. 29, St. Paul asks, "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?" showing that there should be no schism in Christ's mystical body, but that each should occupy the sphere in which the Head of the Church has placed him. If every one was a priest, why did St. Paul, addressing the elders of Ephesus, tell them specially, "Feed the flock of God"? Why set apart Timothy and Titus by the imposition of hands? Why leave Titus in Crete to set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain

elders in every city? (Tit. i. 5–7). Why ordain seven deacons in the Church at Jerusalem, and set them apart distinctly for this office by the imposition of hands and prayer? Why are St. Paul and St. Barnabas spoken of in Acts xiv. 23 as ordaining elders in every city? These statements must have no meaning if they do not convey to every intelligent mind the fact of a regular order having been established and observed in the early Christian Church, in regard to the Christian ministry. In the cases alluded to, we find that holy orders were conferred by those who had derived their commission from our Lord or His Apostles; and we have no single instance recorded in Scripture of any one taking upon himself the office of public preaching except those who were ordained and appointed thereto by men who had authority to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard. When we read, therefore, that Christians are made a kingdom, priests unto God and His Father, we are to understand that they are to be distinguished from the world, as the Jews were from other nations; that Christians are to be distinguished from those who are not Christians by their being a royal priesthood, offering up constantly to God the sacrifice of praise and prayer, and giving themselves in body, soul and spirit, to Him who loved them and gave Himself for them. (See August., *Tract. in Joan.*, 51, quoted by Wordsworth.)

αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν, *to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* There are four doxologies in the Revelation, the one exceeding the other in fulness.[1] That which we have here, and which is twofold, ascribing glory and dominion to Christ; a second in Rev. iv. 9, 11, which is threefold, and which is the doxology of the four and twenty elders; a third which is fourfold, the angelic song of praise to the Lamb (Rev. v. 13); and there is a fourth which is the fullest of all (Rev. v. 12;

[1] See Trench, *in loco.*

vii. 12) in which there is a sevenfold ascription of praise to God and to the Lamb. It is remarkable that the article is placed before each of the subjects of praise which make up this doxology, thus confining the honour to those to whom it is ascribed, a clear proof of the Godhead of Christ. All these doxologies are of the nature of prayer, not petition but adoration, which is the highest form of prayer, and which will enter largely into the communion of saints with God in heaven. The Te Deum, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Sanctus, are all of this character. In the Temple service, public prayer always concluded with a doxology. The people made the response: "Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom for ever and ever." The doxology was never used in private prayer, or in the synagogue; and in this respect we have an argument for the use of the Lord's prayer both in public and private, as recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke, occurring as it does in the one Gospel with a doxology, and in the other without it. The more we dwell upon the excellencies of the Divine character, the more do they become the subjects of thankful praise and adoration, and kindle within us feelings of joy and reverence and love. Praise takes the place of prayer, and we enter as it were within the sacred precincts of the Holy of Holies. We join for the moment with the general assembly and Church of the firstborn in heaven, and mingle with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, in their hallowed, appropriate and unremitting employment. It is for this reason that doxologies are of such frequent occurrence in Scripture. They express an acknowledgment of all blessings and gifts as coming from a Triune God, and gratitude to Him as the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Here glory and dominion are ascribed to Christ: glory, the bright manifestation of His excellencies; dominion, the right which belongs to Him of universal sovereignty, whether in the kingdom of

Providence or grace. There is glory in the natural world, and every devout Christian as he looks upward to the boundless fields of space must join the Psalmist in saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork"; but what perfections meet in all their loveliness and beauty—wisdom, power, justice, mercy, faithfulness, and love—in that new creation which He has made in the hearts of men, with its joys, and hopes, and aspirations, and which will outshine the stars of heaven, and last when the cycles of time shall have ceased to revolve!

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." God is always giving, never receiving; and there is glory in this. On the Cross of Calvary we might read in letters of gold: "Ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich." It is said that on one occasion Alexander the Great told the philosopher, Anaxarchus, to go to his treasurer, and ask from him anything he wanted. The treasurer was surprised at the magnitude of the demand, and refused to pay it without first consulting the king, as he added: "It seemed too much for one man to receive." The king replied: "It is not too much for Alexander to give. He does honour to my riches and liberality by so large a request." So with our faithful covenant-keeping God: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32).

Dominion is also ascribed to Christ. "On His head are many crowns."

Creation is His, for all things were created by Him and for Him.

Providence is His, for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

Grace is His—He opens and no man shuts, He shuts and

no man opens. He has the keys of death and Hades. He is Head over all things to His Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

And His are crowns of victory too. While He has dominion by right, He has it also by conquest. "His own right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Himself the victory." He has triumphed over the world. He could say to His disciples, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The world which He has overcome is that which St. John has described as the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life," all of which presented to Him their tempting power, but in vain. "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." He has vanquished Sin and Satan. He has spoiled Death of its power, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

"His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion endureth throughout all generations." The "stone" spoken of in Daniel ii. 45, "cut out of the mountain without hands," is yet destined to break in pieces every earthly sovereignty and fill all lands with glory. Even, so, blessed Jesus! Thy name shall endure for ever: men shall be blessed in Thee: all nations shall call Thee blessed. "Let the whole earth be filled with Thy glory. Amen and Amen."

Ver. 7. Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς, καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς· ναὶ, ἀμήν. *Behold He cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him: and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over Him. Even so, Amen.* The Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ is here distinctly announced; and, however much men may differ as to the time, manner, and circumstances of that great event, every section of the Chris-

tian Church admits it as a fact, and as an article of faith. It is the theme of the first prophet, for Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied "The Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints"; and St. John, the last inspired Apostle, begins and ends the Book of Revelation by directing attention to that sublime subject: "Behold He cometh with the clouds." In St. Luke we are told, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." St. Matthew records our Lord's words: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven"; and we may believe our Lord in these two passages is appropriating to Himself the words of Daniel's prophecy (vii. 13)—"One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him, and there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him." Can it be supposed for a moment that these events have already had their fulfilment, as Hengstenberg has represented—that the coming with clouds was the fiery train in which Jerusalem was enveloped when destroyed by the overwhelming power of the Roman army? Strauss has upheld this view from our Lord's words—"This γενεὰ (race) shall not pass away till all be fulfilled" (Luke xxi. 32)—but with a different object, namely, that of discrediting our Lord's prophetic character. He renders the word γενεὰ as denoting a generation of thirty or forty years, and he says, if the words spoken by our Lord were true, the advent of Christ should have been shortly after His ascension. But if the word γενεὰ be examined, it will be seen to have no connection whatever with the destruction of Jerusalem, as it stands immediately connected with our Lord's Second Advent. Now instead of the word γενεὰ denoting a generation, Stier renders it a *race*, *nationality*, *class*, and by it he understands the Jewish race. Dean Alford also

adopts the same view: (1) Because there is not one word in reference to the Jews, or Jerusalem, where this verse is introduced. (2) Because in Matt. xxiv. 36, our Lord has said, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man," etc. If the word γενεὰ meant the generation of men then living, our Lord must have announced the day, as the event would have taken place within the limits of a generation. (3) But long after Jerusalem had been destroyed and its inhabitants scattered to the four corners of the earth, the last surviving Apostle and the early Christians were still looking for the Second Advent. The Jewish race are still surviving, and their existence will be coeval with the fulfilment of our Lord's prophecy.

Other races have mingled like streams in the great river of humanity; the Jewish race have been persecuted, trampled upon and crushed, but like the bush which burned at Horeb, they have not been consumed. In their existence in the world, they stand as a living witness for the truth of Christianity; and they await the great event, which is fast drawing nigh, when, like converging streams, they shall meet together, and greet the Messiah—whom they pierced—with their glad Hosannah to the Son of David, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

When our blessed Lord was about to leave the world, it is remarkable how much the Second Advent occupied His thoughts. Every object seemed to turn His attention in that direction. The goodly stones of the temple, the children crying in the temple, the fig-tree putting on its green leaves —all these spoke to Him of that event, and led Him to impress upon His disciples the need of watchfulness, and the duty on their part of waiting the development of God's plans, and marking the lines of Providence in His dealings with His Church; and although He left them in uncertainty as regards the time of the end, they could look around them and see God's purposes ripening, and a succession of events

occurring which were all to lead to that grand consummation. To us who are living in the "last times," there is a confirmation of the faith which the Apostles had not. "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see," may appropriately be applied to us. Glance at the course of Scripture prophecy, and surely there is much to awaken hope in those who look for and love the Saviour's appearing; while, on the other hand, there is much to excite alarm in those who dread His coming.

(1) Forty years had scarcely elapsed from the time of our Lord's ascension, when Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple burned, and its very foundations upturned—"one stone not left upon another,"—and the Jews scattered through all lands, a hissing and a by-word among all nations, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

(2) We live in an age when we are witnessing the expiring throes of two great apostate systems, both of which arose together, and which were to exist side by side with the Church of God for 1260 prophetic years.

(3) We find, the gospel has been preached in many lands for a witness to man's condition, to God's unbounded mercy, to the fulness of Christ's atonement, to the inexcusableness of all before God. Within the last fifty years the gospel has been translated into upwards of two hundred languages and dialects spoken by 800,000,000 of mankind; and we know that, when it is preached for a witness to *all* nations, then shall the end come.

(4) We have seen, and are seeing daily before our eyes, iniquity abounding, the love of many waxing cold, scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world?"—men losing their belief in the supernatural, and regarding the world as governed by the iron law of necessity.

This was not so in the past; it belongs to, and is one special mark of, the age in which we live, not merely observed by the enthusiast in the study of prophecy, but by men who are remarkable for calm and sober views of Scriptural truth. "We are passing over an interval," says Canon Liddon, "which separates the religious past, whose opportunities have been too sadly neglected, from a future of pure secularism."[1]

New forms of evil seem to multiply. Those three unclean spirits like frogs (Rev. xvi. 13), infidelity, secularism, and apostasy, are polluting the nations with their foul and offensive touch, and the witnesses for God and His cause are but a little flock. When the Son of man comes will He find faith on the earth? Men do not retain God in their knowledge; they ignore Him, if they do not deny Him; their lives are for the world alone, as if there was no account to render, as if there was no retribution to apprehend. For the great event that is to come—we know not when, we know not how, except in so far as God hath revealed it—everything would appear to be in preparation, bidding God's people "to lift up their heads, for their redemption draweth nigh."

μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, with the clouds. As He passed away to heaven from the gaze of His astonished disciples, in like manner Christ shall come again. A cloud received Him from their sight, and now "behold He cometh with the clouds." This indicates the majesty and glory with which the Second Advent shall be ushered in; but the clouds with which He shall be surrounded rather bespeak terror than joy. They are symbols of wrath to sinners (Ps. xcvii. 2; xviii. 11). God is frequently represented as encompassed with the clouds as His chariot, and which contribute to veil from the eyes of men His awful majesty (Job xxii. 14; Isa. xix. 1). While the return of Christ will bring joy and gladness to the hearts of His people, it will be a day of judgment and anguish for His

[1] Canon Liddon's *Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 104.

enemies. Perhaps there is no more terrible expression in Holy Scripture than "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 16). "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Ps. ii. 12).

καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς, and every eye shall see Him. Not in any spiritual or transcendental sense shall Christ our King and Judge be seen; but all who are alive at His coming, as well as those who shall have a share in the first resurrection, shall see Him—see Him as He was when, from the Mount of Olives, He left this earth, bearing in His body those marks of suffering which He carried with Him to heaven—those "wounds wherewith He was wounded in the house of His friends" (Zech. xiii. 6). Was not the seeing Christ what Job, the patriarch of Uz, so ardently longed for? "Yet in my flesh shall I see God." I—this poor creaturely being, racked with pain, and weak with sores, brought down with infirmity and disease to the very dust, helpless, bereaved, alone—I shall see the Redeemer for myself, mine eyes shall behold Him, and not another (Job xix. 27). *Every eye shall see Him*, not "with visage marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men"—"an astonishment and a byword" (Deut. xxviii. 37)—so that those who saw Him were dumb with the amazement of scorn at one so abject claiming to be the Messiah; but now He shall be seen coming as from Bozrah, travelling in the greatness of His strength, proclaiming Himself as He that speaks of righteousness, mighty to save those who trust in Him, while He will inflict judgment upon His enemies. It will be a day of judgment to the hostile Gentiles, as His first coming was to the unbelieving Jews.

Every eye shall see Him. Now the heavens have received Him; He has entered within the veil, and as He has gone out of sight of bodily eye, He is forgotten and disowned. Men

live and act as if He was never to return, and as if there was no responsibility. They say, "God hath forgotten : He hideth His face, He will never see it" (Ps. x. 11). Life to them is a mystery ; death a leap in the dark. Eyes have they, but they see not. The god of this world hath blinded the minds of those who believe not ; and with capacities which if rightly made use of, with reason which ought to dignify them, with conscience—the eye of the soul—with all these high endowments, they bring themselves to a level with the brutes that perish. If one would come back from the dead, they would believe—if some sign would be given, the ungodly world would be converted ; but no sign greater than what has been given will be afforded, until they shall see the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, too late for their pardon and peace, too certain to bring dismay and disaster among the ranks of those who knew not the day of their visitation. Blessed are they who, having not seen yet have believed, who now in this their day can adopt the words of the Apostle of the Circumcision, when speaking of those who would be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ : "Whom having not seen, ye love ; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. i. 8).

καὶ οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται, κ.τ.λ., and they which pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over Him. There are two Old Testament prophecies relating to the circumstance of the piercing of Christ, viz. Ps. xxii. 16, and Zech. xii. 10. In the one, there is an allusion to the piercing of His hands and feet with the nails; in the other, there is a prophecy of the conversion of the Jews, when God shall turn the captivity of Zion and plant them in their own land, and when they shall look upon Him whom they pierced. St. John quotes the latter passage in his Gospel (xix. 37). *Ὄψονται εἰς ὃν ἐξεκέντησαν.* In the Hebrew it is דָּקָרוּ

(*dakaru*), which is correctly rendered "pierced." The Septuagint version is here different; κατωρχήσαντο is used, which signifies "danced for joy," or "insulted." The Jews pierced Christ not less by their cruel mockeries and insults than they did by the spear. As He listens to the taunts of the reckless multitude, and watches their malignant doings, how deeply must their bitter arrows have penetrated His soul, when He cried, "They that see Me laugh Me to scorn, they shoot out their lips, they shake their heads, saying, He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him if He delight in Him" (Ps. xxii. 8, comp. with Matt. xxvii. 42). But in Zechariah the words which St. John here refers to, and which are also alluded to in his Gospel, are connected with a gracious dispensation. They speak of repentance and a return to the Lord; here, however, there does not appear to be any manifestation of grace, but rather a revelation of judgment and righteous indignation. The restoration of the Jews and their final conversion are clearly the subjects of prophecy; and St. Paul in Romans xi. has shown that they shall occupy a prominent position, and serve an important purpose, in the future of the Church; for "if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi. 15). Except by way of adaptation, the words here can hardly apply to the Jews at all. *All the tribes of the earth*—πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς—refer to the Gentile world, "the world that lieth in the evil one." Our Lord in the Gospel (Matt. xxiv. 30) has used these latter words in this connection, as indicative of the confusion and despair of unbelievers, when they shall see Him whom they slighted and rejected, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and we cannot doubt that the expression, *All the tribes of the earth*, includes all to whom the message of salvation has been offered in vain—all whose god is the world, whose treasure is here, whose hearts have

been detached from God, their true centre, and who have not set their affections on things above. They shall wail with remorse and despair, because the things belonging to their peace, once within their reach, are now hid for ever from their eyes. That the phrase *the tribes of the earth* bears this signification we may refer to St. Augustine (as quoted by Wordsworth), Serm. 57: "Ecclesia Dei cœlum est, inimici Ejus terra sunt." The Church of God is heaven, His enemies are the earth.

Ναὶ, ἀμήν, even so, Amen. This is not the expression of a wish on the part of St. John; it is rather the affirmation of a certainty. A double Amen—the one in Hebrew, the other in Greek. It is God's seal to the truth of these solemn statements of revelation, to assure us that though heaven and earth pass away, His word shall not pass away. God's promises and threatenings are unchangeable. If God is eternal, then what He proclaims as truth is eternal; whether that truth is revealed in His word, or in the human conscience, it lasts; it is above the water-floods of change. "Thy word, O Lord, endureth for ever in heaven."

Ver. 8. *Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ω, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ὢν, καὶ ὁ ἦν, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.* It would seem difficult to ascertain whether this designation, Alpha and Ω, refers to God the Father, or God the Son, in the passage now before us, as the declaration is that of "the Lord the God," without any special adaptation to one person more than another of the Trinity. In verse 4, God the Father is spoken of by the very same terms which are here used, "who is, who was, and who is to come;" but as the Revelation is that of Jesus Christ, as He is the author of it (verse 1), we may regard these words as spoken by Him. In verse 17, Christ calls Himself the First

and the Last; and in chapter ii. 8, the title is more definite still, for He adds, "which was dead, and lived again." In chapters xxi. 6, and xxii. 13, the expression, Alpha and Ω is applied by our Lord Jesus Christ to Himself; and as it is thus used in other portions of the Revelation in regard to Christ, we may also consider it as applicable here. There is, however, the designation, *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, *who is to come*, which must be taken to convey a different meaning from *ὁ ἐσόμενος*, *who shall be;* and surely it was not without some intention that the one word was used instead of the other. The Coming One is the theme, the subject and substance of the book, and can only refer to the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. With it the book begins, with it it ends. The Alpha of the Old Testament was laid in Paradise lost, the Omega of the New is in Paradise regained. Alpha and Ω, as applied to Christ, is a proof of His Godhead. He is the initial cause, as well as the end of all creation. The Jewish Rabbins use to speak of the commencement and end of a thing as being from א to ת; and the use of the Greek letters, instead of the Hebrew, would indicate the universality of the Gospel dispensation, the revelation of the mystery which was from all ages hid in Christ. The beginning and end of all things is Christ, as He was at the starting-point of all time. "In the beginning was the Word." At a point when time was not, when as yet the orbs of space were uncreated, Jesus Christ existed, not *παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ*, *along with God*, but *πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν*, *with God*, in close and constant communion.

ἐν ἀρχῇ. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. *ἐν ἀρχῇ*. In the beginning was the Word. Do these refer to the same point of time? Certainly not. We may regard the act of creation as occurring at the initial moment of time; but the *ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος* goes back beyond our conceptions of time to the æons of past duration—and then was the Logos existing, everlastingly present with God. The

Word was God; and if so, how can we conceive of His being God, and other than eternal?[1]

"This declaration of Christ concerning Himself, 'I am the Alpha and the Ω,' was reverently accepted," says Wordsworth, "by early Christian art, and is often seen in ancient inscriptions, particularly in the catacombs of Rome, where the symbols A and Ω are frequently accompanied by the well-known monogram of Christos, ☧. In one case the symbol is accompanied with the words ES DEIS, probably DEUS, 'Thou art God,' asserting the Godhead of Christ."[2] The use of the definite articles prefixed to the A and Ω clearly shows that Christ is the only beginning and end of all things, and that beside Him there is no other, a distinct proof of the co-equality and co-eternity of Christ with the Father (Isa. xli. 4; xliv. 6; xlviii. 12).

ὁ ὢν, ὁ ἦν, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the existing one, He who was, and He who is to come. Christ's names here with the article before each may be regarded as proper. The *ὁ ὢν, κ.τ.λ.*, correspond with the Hebrew יְהוָה, and reminds us of the description given by the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses at Horeb in the bush. He who is at once God and His Angel is Christ; and when Moses asked God His name, God said, *Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ Ὤν*, and *ὁ Ὤν* sent me to you. "This is My name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations." From this it appears that Christ's name from eternity was *ὁ Ὤν*, or the Existing One (John i. 18; vi. 46). Christ then is *ὁ ὢν* in His unity with God from everlasting; He is *ὁ ἦν* after His incarnation, and *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, in His Second Advent as our King and Judge.

ὁ παντοκράτωρ, the Almighty. Excepting in 2 Cor. vi. 18, a quotation from Isaiah, this word does not occur in any part of the New Testament besides the Revelation, where

[1] See Canon Liddon's *Bampton Lectures*, p. 226.
[2] Bp. Wordsworth, *on Rev.*, p. 168.

it is found in iv. 8; xi. 17; xix. 6; and xxi. 22. It is correctly rendered "Almighty." The Hebrew words corresponding to it are שַׁדַּי (Shaddai), יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת (Jehovah Sabaoth), the one indicative of the power with which God works, and the other the instrumentality with which He executes that power. All power in heaven and earth belongs to Christ; He can therefore save His people under every circumstance, and scatter His enemies, like the dust before the wind. As He is the Omnipotent Lord God, there need be no discouragement to His suffering people, or any doubt that what He has purposed shall come to pass. Christ's dominion was to be universal; His kingdom an everlasting kingdom, and of His dominion and government there should be no end. The powers of the world were then directed against His Church in the person of His persecuted Apostle, but His name is *ὁ παντοκράτωρ*, the Almighty—"I am the Lord, I change not," I ever live, and what I have spoken shall stand from generation to generation. "Unto the Son God saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. i. 8).

DIVINE COMMISSION AND VISION.

CHAP. i. 9–20.

9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ
ὑπομονῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ, διὰ τὸν λόγον
τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.
10 Ἐγενόμην ἐν Πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ· καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν
μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος,
11 Λεγούσης· Ὃ βλέπεις, γράψον εἰς βιβλίον, καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς
Ἔφεσον, καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν, καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον, καὶ εἰς Θυάτειραν, καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις, καὶ εἰς
Φιλαδέλφιαν, καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.
12 Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἥτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ· καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον
ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς·
13 Καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον Υἱῷ ἀνθρώπου ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη, καὶ
περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσῆν.
14 Ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν, ὡς χιών· καὶ οἱ
ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρός,
15 Καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ, ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένοι, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ
αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν,
16 Καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ χειρὶ ἀστέρας ἑπτά· καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ
ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει
αὐτοῦ.
17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτὸν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός· καὶ ἔθηκε τὴν δεξιὰν
αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ, λέγων· Μὴ φοβοῦ· ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος,
18 Καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς, καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων·
καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου.
19 Γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες, καὶ ἃ εἰσι, καὶ ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.
20 Τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων ὧν εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου, καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ
λυχνίας τὰς χρυσᾶς. Οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες, ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλεσιῶν εἰσι· καὶ λυχνίαι
αἱ ἑπτὰ, ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσί.

9 I John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation, and kingdom and patience *which are* in Christ Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.
10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,
11 Saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* to the seven churches; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.
12 And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks:
13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like the Son of man, clothed with a long garment reaching down to his feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.
14 And his head and *his* hair *were* white as white wool, as snow; and his eyes *were* as a flame of fire;
15 And his feet like unto burnished brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters.
16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength.
17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last,
18 And the Living one; and I was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
19 Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter;
20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

DIVINE COMMISSION AND VISION.

Ver. 9. *Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν, καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει, καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ, διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. I John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation, and kingdom and patience which are in Christ Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.* In the previous part of this chapter, we have had the title and inscription of the book, and the salutation which ends in verse 8. We now come to the Revelation proper, the first portion of which is occupied with the messages to the seven Churches. In this verse we have the Apostle's commission, and the circumstances under which he was placed when that commission was bestowed upon him. He addresses the seven Churches as being in the same suffering condition as he was, and not as one desiring to exercise lordship over God's heritage; he has learned to "weep with them that weep." He calls himself their brother and fellow-sufferer. The word *καὶ*, rendered *also*, in A.V. is not found in ancient MSS. and is not inserted here, because it would seem to imply that he was more than a fellow-sufferer—that he was an Apostle, and also partaker in the affliction and kingdom and endurance in Christ Jesus. The Apostle St. Peter uses similar language: "The elders who are among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder," etc.

In this we see nothing of supremacy claimed by St. Peter over his brethren; nor in the case of St. John do we see any marks of that striving for superiority which our blessed Lord rebuked. The grace of God had subdued his pride and moderated his ambition; and while he was the last surviving Apostle, and might have claimed honour from and dictated to the Churches, he breathes the spirit of deep humility, and rejoices in identifying himself with those who were suffering in the cause of Christ. With the Psalmist he might well say, "Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, and Thy gentleness hath made me great." (2 Sam. xxii. 36). He speaks in the first person, "I John." Nowhere else do we find him adopting this form. He speaks of himself as the disciple that Jesus loved, the disciple that leaned on Jesus' breast, the disciple who testifieth of these things; but never does he speak of himself in the first person, except in the Revelation, and this he does in two places besides this, viz.: Rev. xxi. 2; xxii. 8. The same style is found in the Book of Daniel also in three places, Dan. vii. 28; ix. 2; x. 2; and we may consider this feature of St. John's writing as exhibiting a point of resemblance between the Hebrew prophet of the Captivity and the New Testament seer. Indeed, the Revelation may be regarded as the sequel to and completion of Daniel's Prophecy.

ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν, *I John, your brother*—not, I John, the Apostle, the privileged disciple, who had been an eyewitness of the transfiguration; who had been at the last supper, at Gethsemane, and at the cross; to whose care the Saviour of the world committed His mother in His last agony, and who had been one of the earliest to see the risen Redeemer on the morning of His resurrection day—but, I John, your brother in Christ Jesus—one who has become partaker of the Divine nature, being born again by the Holy

Ghost,—who am a member of the same household of faith, a sharer with you in all your joys and sorrows, your trials and triumphs, and who now identify myself with the suffering Church. The Roman orator once said,[1] "I am a man, and whatever relates to man cannot be a matter of indifference to me;" so here the last surviving Apostle, no longer looking for a seat on the right hand or the left hand in an earthly kingdom, is content to style himself a brother in adversity, happier in his exile than Cæsar on the throne of the world. He was then doing the will of his heavenly Father, and like his Lord and Master, by the things he suffered he was learning obedience, establishing his claim to be one of Christ's "brethren," and, as such, the brother of all who are united to Christ in the bonds of the Gospel.

καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει, κ.τ.λ., *and partaker with you in the tribulation, and kingdom and patience which are in Christ Jesus.* Tribulation was a portion of Christ's legacy bequeathed to His Church (John xvi. 33), and it is here called "the tribulation," because it is the necessary process through which the Christian must pass previous to entering the kingdom. St. Paul has said: "Yea, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12). The true Israel of God redeemed from every nation are said to have come out of the great tribulation (Rev. vii. 9), and we may regard it therefore as the Christian's heritage. It is needful in order that we may be like Christ, that we should be conformed to Him in suffering. Was not this what St. Paul desired when he wrote, "That I may know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings"? Christ's sufferings, from the perfection of His nature, were greater than the sufferings of others, for the more perfect the life, the greater the capacity for pain; and, therefore, St. Paul wished to have the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, because, to have that

[1] Terence, *Heautontimor.*, Act i. sc. 1.

fellowship, he should be raised in the scale of being. St. John does not murmur because he was a fellow-partaker in the tribulation. He knew if he could be brought nearer his Divine Master than he was, if he could attain to a higher life, the path was by suffering. This is so still. There is no royal road to heaven ; each one must be prepared to take up his cross if he would follow Christ, and never falter, or feel discouraged because of the roughness of the way. We need purity of heart, holiness of life, and an upward, heavenward, aim of our affections. Our pride must be mortified, our self-esteem lessened, our presumptuous self-confidence humbled ; and what is better adapted to this end than the lessons which we learn in the school of affliction ? We would like to have the maximum of happiness with the minimum of sorrow, to enjoy the triumphs of victory without undergoing the struggle ; but it is otherwise ordered ; and we may here venture to suggest that in St. John's participating in the sufferings of the Church, he was, perhaps unconsciously, fulfilling the Lord's prediction respecting the drinking of His cup and being baptized with His baptism (Matt. xx. 22). St. James, the first Apostolic martyr, had long previously been put to death by the sword ; and St. John has to drink Christ's cup in a different manner, by patient and protracted suffering in a lonely island.

καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ, κ.τ.λ., *and kingdom and patience which are in Christ Jesus.* St. John adds that, while fellow partaker in the tribulation with the Churches addressed, he was also co-partner with them in the kingdom now realized by hope, and to the final enjoyment of which the safe way was calm endurance. The tribulation is placed first in order, the kingdom next ; for the one leads to the other. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." The places sought for St. James and St. John on the right hand and left hand of Christ in His kingdom, were not to be enjoyed without first drinking

Christ's cup, and being baptized with His baptism. In our Authorized Version, the gift of the kingdom is made to read as if Christ's right of bestowal was ignored, and the Revised New Testament has not improved the old rendering, which has always been regarded by the best critics as objectionable; but the Greek plainly recognises Christ's right to confer the kingdom, for it is, *τὸ δὲ καθίσαι ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, καὶ ἐξ εὐωνύμων μου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι ἀλλ' οἷς ἡτοίμασται ὑπὸ τοῦ Πατρός μου*, "but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand, is not mine to give, save to those for whom it has been prepared of my Father."[1] The mother of St. James and St. John sought for her sons the highest honour that could be bestowed; and, considering her views of an earthly kingdom, it was not altogether unnatural for her to seek such preferment; but she was ignorant both of the nature of the kingdom and the principles upon which admission to places of honour were to be obtained. She likely thought that, as Eastern princes and potentates were accustomed to grant requests in an arbitrary manner, Christ would probably do the same. This our Lord showed her could not be. The honours belonging to His kingdom His Father had prepared. There was nothing left to be arranged according as circumstances should occur. All had already been arranged—places, crowns, robes—all ready for those who drink Christ's cup and are baptized with His baptism; and they shall be given by the Great Master, not by way of boon or favour, but according to the principles of justice and impartiality, for there is no respect of persons with Him. In the cup of Christ and the baptism of Christ, we have two kinds of suffering expressed, one or other of which we must all be prepared to undergo. St. James and St. John illustrate both respectively—the one, the baptism of blood; the other, the bitter cup of affliction. The seats prepared are yet to be obtained, and for them the Church above and the Church

[1] Matt. xx. 23.

on earth are patiently waiting in hope; and the bestowal of them will be Christ's rightful prerogative as Head of His Church and Judge of all men. So St. Paul distinctly states when, speaking of his hopes beyond the grave, he says, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. iv. 8).

ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νησῷ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ, διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, κ.τ.λ., was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The word *ἐγενόμην*, Bishop Wordsworth renders *became*, and supplies the word *dweller* to make the clause read intelligibly. Dr. Vaughan also translates *ἐγενόμην*, *became*, and makes this word mean *came into*. It is singular that neither in the Authorized Version, nor in the Revised New Testament, this rendering has been recognised. The passage reads as if the Greek had been *ἦν, was*, instead of *ἐγενόμην*, *became*; and it is not without good reason the change alluded to has been made. As it reads in our English version, we have no indication as to whether St. John was in Patmos *voluntarily*, or otherwise—whether he went there of his own accord to preach the gospel, or to receive the sublime revelation which he has recorded for our instruction; or whether, on the other hand, his dwelling in Patmos was not his own choosing, but by constraint. The word *ἐγενόμην*, conveys to us the latter view, *I became—I found myself* in the island that is called Patmos. It is not reasonable to suppose that St. John, in his extreme old age, would have left Ephesus and his interesting and important work in that city, to go to a sterile, remote and desolate island, to preach the gospel; nor is it probable that he was directed to go there to write the Apocalypse, for he could as well have received at Ephesus, where he wrote his Gospel, the necessary instruction for enabling him to commit to writing the things he had seen in vision. The cause of his being in Patmos was *compulsory*—"on account of the word of

God"—on account of his preaching the word of God, and his testimony to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. What that testimony was we may gather from Acts iii. 12–22; iv. 10–12, 20. That St. John was so banished from Ephesus we have the testimony of Eusebius, who relates that some of the Christians were banished by the Emperor Domitian, and confined as prisoners in a small island off the coast of Etruria; and then he states that St. John was banished to the Isle of Patmos by Domitian.[1] St. Jerome says that St. John was banished to the isle of Patmos in the fourteenth year of the reign of Domitian, and there he wrote the Apocalypse.[2] St. Irenæus states that for sixty years after the Ascension, St. John preached orally till the end of Domitian's reign, and after the death of Domitian, having returned to Ephesus, he was induced to write his Gospel concerning the Divinity of Christ co-eternal with the Father, in which he refutes the heretics, Cerinthus, and the Nicolaitans, and the Ebionites, who denied that Christ had existed before Mary.[3] All these writers show that, for the faithful testimony which St. John bore to the word of God and to the Lord Jesus Christ, he was exiled to the isle that is called Patmos. Irenæus further states that, after the death of Domitian, St. John returned from Patmos to Ephesus, where he lived to the reign of Trajan, and died at Ephesus in the sixty-eighth year after our Lord's crucifixion.[4]

ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ, in the island that is called Patmos. This island was one of a group in the Ægean Sea called Sporades, and was situated about 30 miles south of Samos, and 60 miles S.W. of Ephesus. It was so small and insignificant that it was little known in St. John's day, and we can therefore understand the particularity with which he describes it—"the island that is called Patmos." It

[1] Euseb., *Chron.*, lib. ii. ad Olymp. 218.
[2] *St. Jerome*, Ep. 87.
[3] *Iren.*, v. 30, 3.
[4] *Iren.*, ii. 22, 5.

was a rugged, bare and rocky island, about 8 miles long by one mile broad, and 15 miles in circumference, without cultivation, except in small patches among the rocks, and possessing but few inhabitants. Victorinus, bishop and martyr, at the close of the third century, tells us that, when John saw the Apocalypse, he was in the island of Patmos, being condemned by Domitian Cæsar to the mines there; and that when John, on account of his old age, supposed he would have a release by death, Domitian was slain, and his decrees were rescinded, and John was liberated from the mines.[1] Condemnation to the mines was the punishment inflicted upon criminals of the worst sort; and it has been considered that banishment was the only punishment St. John suffered, as there is no allusion by any of the early writers, except Victorinus, to the circumstance of the Apostle's working in the mines. Amongst the Romans, transportation was a common punishment.[2] Patmos is now called Patmo, or Patmosa, and has a town called Patmos, with a harbour and some monasteries of Greek monks; and on the side of the hill on which the town is built, a natural grotto is shown in a rock, where St. John is said to have seen his visions and to have written the Revelation. Domitian thought to silence the Apostle, and crush the infant Church, by sending the aged president of the Church at Ephesus into exile, but in vain did the waves of persecution beat against the ark of God, because God was upholding it. And in that lonely island of Patmos, where the Apostle was cut off from all means of usefulness, where no longer he could go up to the house of God with them who kept holy day, where no longer he could teach the faithful flock at Ephesus the great truths of Christianity with that Apostolic authority and love for which he was so remarkable, he was not left comfortless.

[1] Victorinus, *in Apoc.* x. 11, quoted by Wordsworth.
[2] *Juvenal*, i. 73. Tacit., *Annal.*, i. 39.

In his retirement and banishment he had a work to do for God, greater perhaps than what he could have done at Ephesus; he had to record the closing scenes of Revelation, the last words of Christ to mankind, until that day when we shall no longer see in a mirror dimly, but behold our Saviour face to face, when He shall come again, to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. And is it not so that in our own experience we have often found that, when deprived of those earthly stays on which we have been leaning, and when the gourd which we looked upon as "a shadow to our heads to deliver us from our grief," has been removed, the Lord Himself has come to us and whispered in our ears, "Fear not, for I am with thee"? Our earthly joys are often like the incoming wave which breaks upon the shore, while our sorrows are like the wave which recedes, carrying us out to the great ocean of Godhead, and making us cling more firmly to Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Ver. 10, 11. *Ἐγενόμην ἐν Πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ· καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος, λεγούσης· Ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον, καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτά ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον, καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν, καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον, καὶ εἰς Θυάτειραν, καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις, καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν, καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*

Ἐγενόμην ἐν Πνεύματι, I became in the Spirit. He *became* a dweller in Patmos, and while there he *became* supernaturally influenced. His mental and spiritual faculties were so removed from the regions of time and sense, that he was, as it

were, transported out of himself. Like St. Paul, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell. We call this transition a state of trance, or ecstasy. In the case of St. Paul, that extraordinary rapture to the third heaven, which he speaks of in 2 Cor. xii. 2, was vouchsafed when he was about to enter upon his great mission as the Apostle of the Gentiles, probably because he was to labour more abundantly, and endure more humiliation, affliction and suffering, than the rest of the Apostles; and to strengthen him for the work before him, it was needful he should have visions from the Lord, so that, amid all his trials and sorrows, he could look upward and say: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. viii. 18). In like manner, St. John describes himself as being carried out of himself, and becoming the subject of distinct supernatural manifestations—of hearing things not to be kept secret, and seeing things which were not to be concealed—but he was privileged to see the vision in order that he might record it for the benefit of the Church, and that his faith might be strengthened in those dark and lonely hours of exile he was called upon to endure for the sake of his Lord and Master. As his day, so should his strength be; and as the sufferings of Christ were abundant in him, so his consolation was made to abound by Christ.

ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, on the Lord's day. Not the Day of the Lord as some would interpret it, because if such a meaning were attached to the expression, it would suppose St. John was carried in some extraordinary manner to the Day of Judgment, and the scenes with which its advent would be accompanied, and that on that day when the Church on earth would be exchanged for the Church in heaven, he was to write certain Epistles to seven Churches in Asia Minor! There are only two places in the New Testament where the word *ἡ κυριακή* occurs, namely here, *ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα*, and 1 Cor.

xi. 20, *κυριακὸν δεῖπνον*. When the Day of the Lord is spoken of it is always *ἡμέρα Κυρίου* that is used. The Lord's day, or the day belonging to the Lord, is some day that He has specially made His own by some signal act, and properly applies to the day of our Lord's resurrection. It was the day on which He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. i. 4). It was His resting day, because on that day the work of atonement had been for ever completed. The day of Christ's incarnation or His passion could not be called by the name, the Lord's day, because He had yet to labour before He entered into His rest; nor could the day of His ascension be called the Lord's day, for by His ascension He only entered into His *place* of rest, He having by His resurrection already entered into His *state* of rest; so that the first day of the week, or Christian sabbath, has, ever since the morning of His resurrection, been designated the Lord's day. Christ arose from the dead on the first day of the week. Twice he appeared to His disciples on that day; on that day He gave special evidence of His resurrection; on that day He gave first the earnest of the Spirit, and afterwards poured out upon His Church the full effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, which was the fiftieth day after the Passover, as we find in Lev. xxiii. 16, where it is said, the morrow after the seventh sabbath is the fiftieth day; and on the first day of the week the Apostles and early Christians were accustomed to meet for religious worship and "breaking of bread." In Acts xx. 7, we read that "on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them." Now we find in verse 6, that he had already been seven days with the disciples at Troas, yet on none of the seven are we told they met for public worship, but on the first day of the week only. For all these reasons, the day on which St. John was in the Spirit was the first day

of the week, or Lord's day. It was known as such when St. John wrote the Revelation, and we find that on that day it was customary for the disciples to meet together for the reception of Holy Communion and for hearing the word of God. Justin Martyr, in his *Apology*, i. 85, says: "On the day called Sunday, our common assembly of all who are in the cities and the country is held, and we read the writings of the apostles and the books of the prophets." Then, after describing the sermon, the administration of Holy Communion, and the collection of alms for the poor, he adds "We all assemble together in common on the day called Sunday, because it is the day on which God created the world out of darkness and ὕλη, and on which Jesus Christ our Saviour arose from the dead; for on the day before Saturday they crucified Him, and on the day after Saturday He arose from the grave, and taught His apostles and disciples those things which we have delivered to you." St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who was a martyr in the reign of Trajan, desires those to whom he wrote to "keep the Lord's day, on which our Life arose,"[1] and St. Barnabas, his contemporary, says, "We observe the eighth day with gladness in which Jesus rose from the dead."[2] And Eusebius bears testimony to the first day of the week as the Lord's day, when he writes: "The Logos (Christ) by the new covenant translated and transferred the feast of the sabbath to the morning light, and gave us the symbol of true rest, the saving Lord's day, the first day of the week. On this day we do those things, according to the spiritual law, which were decreed for the priests to do on the sabbath; all things proper to do on the sabbath we have transferred to the Lord's day. . . . it is delivered to us that we should meet on this day."[3] It was then the day of our Lord's resurrection, the first day of the week, that St. John was privi-

[1] S. Ignat., *ad Magnes.*, sec. 9.
[2] S. Barnab., *Ep.*, c. xv. 3.
[3] Euseb., *H. E.*, iv. 23, 8.

leged to enjoy that marvellous manifestation which he afterwards describes; and therefore the observance of that day for religious worship has both the authority of Christ and Apostolic sanction. St. John did not forget the claims of the Lord's day in his lonely exile, and as he honoured God, God honoured him. That day for the Apostle, as it should ever be for us, was the Day of days. It taught him that the resurrection power of Christ was the guarantee for the efficacy of His sacrifice and the salvation of His people, to the end of time. It told him that Christ lives to intercede, and, because He lives, we shall live also; it poured a flood of light upon the Garden and the Cross, and pointed to the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Well might he take up the words of Psalm cxviii. and say, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου, κ.τ.λ., *and I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet.* When in that state of ecstasy in which his bodily and mental existence were merged in the spiritual, he heard a great voice, as of a trumpet, to summon his attention, and gradually prepare him for what he was now to see. He had in his early days been familiar with the sound of the trumpet, which the priests were accustomed to use, in publishing the approach of festivals, or giving the signals of war. The first day of every month was sacred to the Jews, and was announced by the sound of a trumpet. Every solemn festival and every public assembly was introduced by the deep sound of a trumpet as recorded in Numbers x. 10; and perhaps as this sound was so familiar to St. John, he makes use of it to describe the character of that voice which he heard behind him. In Psalm xxix. the voice of the Lord is compared to the loud thunder peal, and therefore it may be said to be a great voice. The trumpet is alluded to as calling the dead to judgment (Matt. xxiv. 31; 1 Cor. xv. 52; 1 Thess. iv. 16). The object of that loud and thrilling voice which the Apostle

heard could not be mistaken, and he proceeds to tell us the instruction he received.

λεγούσης· Ὃ *βλέπεις, γράψον, κ.τ.λ., saying, What thou seest, write in a book, etc.* The revised New Testament properly omits the words, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," which words are not in the Greek text, and must have found their place in any copy in which they are inserted, by the carelessness of transcribers. The things that thou now seest, write at once (*γράψον*) into a book. The word *βιβλίον* means a *roll* or *scroll*, books having been written in ancient times in that form; and even still the Jews use rolls in their synagogues. Various materials were used for writing before the invention of paper. Parchment, *περγάμηνη*, takes its name from Pergamum (the seat of one of the seven Churches of Asia Minor), and was invented by the kings of that place, because the kings of Egypt refused to allow the exportation of papyrus out of their dominions, as they were jealous of any imitation of their great library at Alexandria. Hesiod's works were written on leaden tablets; the laws of Solon on wooden planks; and the moral law, which God delivered to Moses, on tables of stone. St. John was enjoined to write immediately upon a roll what he saw, and we may therefore believe the vision was recorded by him while he was in Patmos. But why enjoined to be written? Might not the Apostle have been the sole guardian of that Revelation, and have dispensed a knowledge of it to the "Angels" of the seven Churches from time to time, as they were able to receive it, so that they might communicate it to the people? If there is any meaning in this direction given to St. John, it is that all possibility of change or error, in the lapse of time, should be prevented, and that the Churches should not be left to the uncertain voice of tradition, in ascertaining the knowledge of God's will. Why were the tables of stone delivered to Moses? That Divine truth might

be preserved, and handed down to future generations. Why were the books of the New Testament ordered to be written? "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name" (John xx. 31). Irenæus says: "We know not the dispensing of our salvation through any others than those by which the gospel came to us; what they then preached, afterwards indeed by the will of God they delivered to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith."[1] St. Augustine also adds his testimony in a similar manner: "Therefore since they have written what He (Christ) made known and spoke, it is by no means to be said that He did not write Himself, since His members performed that which they knew by the dictation of the Head; for whatsoever He wished us to read concerning His deeds and words, this He commanded to be written by them, or by His members."[2]

The word was written that the faith might be preserved and that no admixture of error should be permitted to enter into God's revealed will. And to St. John, the last surviving Apostle, was made the final communication of that will, not for himself alone; but he was commanded to write it in a book—that in future ages we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. To him the eventful history of the Church in her trials and triumphs was disclosed, and by him recorded as a chart to guide her through the ocean of the world, in the dark midnight of time. The distinction therefore between the written and unwritten word is untenable. If tradition contradict the word of God, it must be rejected; if it agree with it, it is useless. What has not been committed to writing must, in the lapse of centuries, have lost much of its original character, and would therefore be a very

[1] *Adv. Hæres.*, lib. xi. c. 47.
[2] Aug., *de Consensu Evang.*, lib i., cap. *ult.*

unsafe guide to depend upon. Even in the written word we find interpolations and omissions, the insertion of side notes in the text, and various readings of many passages. If it was hard to preserve in its integrity what was written, how much more difficult to keep, with any degree of trustworthiness, what was unwritten. Never can we forget the withering rebuke given by our Lord to the Pharisees and scribes: "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark. vii. 7, 9).

What thou seest, write in a book. What things were to be written? Evidently all the vision that the Apostle saw; not merely the things contained in chapters ii. and iii., but the whole of the Revelation. The seven Churches were not only to have the advantage of those special Epistles that were addressed to them; but the entire Revelation which Christ was pleased to show to His servant John. The seven Churches were as much concerned in knowing the whole book, as they were in being made acquainted with the messages sent to them. Just as the Epistles addressed to these Churches were not for them alone, but for all Churches—"He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches"—so the unveiling of the mind of God in regard to the Church, through the centuries which were to pass, concerned the Asiatic Churches as much as it does ourselves. It gave them the same hopes, comforts, and consolations in their sufferings and sorrows as it has afforded to Christians in every age, making earthly things fade away by reason of "the glory that excelleth," and opening to the enraptured vision that bright world where faith and hope and patient waiting for Christ, shall have their full and perfect consummation. The things that St. John was to write are enumerated in verse 19: "The things which thou hast seen, the things that are, and the things which shall be hereafter." "The things which

thou hast seen" are clearly those referred to in verse 11, and are identical with "the things that are, and that shall be hereafter." Dean Alford is hardly justified in construing the καὶ ἃ εἰσι to mean "what things they signify"; because the ἃ εἰσι are clearly put in contrast with ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι. Bishop Wordsworth also takes the same view as Alford. He says: "St. John was not only admitted to see, and enabled to describe, the mysteries of the spiritual world and of futurity, but also to *explain* them." *What thou seest*, St. John was to write in a book, and this vision was to include the things that are—the present condition of the Churches, and what should be the future disclosures of God's Providence in relation to His Church till the end of time.

καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις κ.τ.λ., *and send it to the seven churches, etc.* Why these seven Churches were selected to the exclusion of others in the same region, such as Tralles, Magnesia, Miletus, Hierapolis, and Colossæ, we have no means of ascertaining satisfactorily. We may conjecture, and offer some reasons which may occur to us as guiding this selection; but, at best, the solution of this difficult question must only be considered as probable. (1) The number *seven* is typical and representative, and is used to denote completeness and universality. So St. Augustine writes: "Numero septenario Universæ Ecclesiæ significata est plenitudo: propter quod et Joannes Apostolus ad septem scribit Ecclesias, eo modo se ostendens ad unius plenitudinem scribere."[1] It has been observed that St. Paul wrote seven Epistles to Gentile Churches, and in doing so, he wrote to all. So in the Revelation seven Epistles are written to seven specified Churches, and all Churches are addressed.

(2) There may have been in these Churches certain features or characteristics which would be observable in the Church of Christ in every age, and in directing attention to

[1] Aug., *de Civ. Dei*, xvii. 4.

them, whether by way of approval or censure, they would afford a beacon light through all time, either to warn of danger, or to guide in safety into the desired haven. This may account for Churches of lesser note having been addressed, while those of more importance were omitted. If we may suppose the condition of these several Churches to embrace all the marks of faithfulness or unfaithfulness, of vitality or decay, of earnest zeal or hollow indifference, of spiritual progress or hopeless retrogression, then it will be clear that, in selecting these Churches, the great Head of the Church designed to impart a lesson which might be learned with profit in every age.

(3) That such was His design, we have only to examine the state of the seven Churches addressed.

Ephesus is addressed first, being the capital of Proconsular Asia, nearest to Patmos, and the Church which had been presided over by St. John himself. It was marked chiefly for its intolerance of evil, and of those who said they were Apostles and were not; but it was censured because it had left its first love.

Smyrna was a seaport town of Ionia, about forty miles north of Ephesus. The "Angel" of the Church of Smyrna, Christian history informs us, was Polycarp, the disciple of St. John. The commendations given to the Angel of the Church of Smyrna agree well with this fact, for in the entire Epistle there is not a word of censure, but, on the contrary, the highest praise for patience and faithfulness during a period of persecution.

Pergamum, now called Bergama, was a city of Mysia, one of the most renowned of Asiatic cities, once the residence of King Eumenes, and of other Attalic princes. The Church in that place was first praised for constancy and firmness in holding fast the faith in the midst of fearful persecution; yet there is censure, because she kept within her communion certain

persons of corrupt lives and erroneous doctrine—Balaamites or Nicolaitans, who were a stumbling-block to weak brethren, and a disgrace to the Christian profession.

Thyatira was in Lydia, and is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, xvi. 14, as the city to which Lydia, who was converted by the preaching of St. Paul, belonged. The Church of Thyatira is addressed in terms of praise and blame; her faith, works, patience, and charity, are all recognised; but having permitted the false prophetess to seduce many, she is called upon to repent, or, if not, He whose eyes were as a flame of fire and whose feet were as fine brass, would visit her transgressions with the rod, and her iniquity with stripes.

Sardis, the ancient capital of Crœsus and the Lydian kings was situated at the foot of Mount Tmolus, on a plain watered by the river Pactolus, whose waters are said to have carried in their current golden sands, the source of the immense riches amassed by these potentates.

The Church of Sardis was characterized by its members having a high name while they were spiritually dead. Spiritual declension was everywhere apparent, and the Church is reproached for backsliding, apathy, and hypocrisy. High in reputation among the other Churches, He who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men, weighs her in the balance and finds her wanting—her profession no better than "the sounding brass or tinkling cymbal."

Philadelphia, the sixth in order of the Churches here named, was situated in the province of Lydia, and so called from Attalus Philadelphus, king of Pergamum, by whom the city was founded. It stood on a lower slope of Mount Tmolus, about 28 miles S.E. of Sardis. This city was greatly subject to earthquakes. The Church of Philadelphia receives unmixed praise. She had little strength, and in a time of severe trial was faithful in keeping Christ's word; and

an open door of usefulness was set before this Church by Christ Himself.

Laodicea was in Phrygia, and was so called from Laodice, wife of Antiochus II. It was not far from Colosse, and was watered by the river Lycus. Its ancient name was Diospolis, afterwards Rhaos, and lastly Laodicea; a great commercial city. The Church here was rich in its own estimate, "having need of nothing," and is characterized by want of zeal in the cause of Christ, and a lukewarmness which our Lord condemns in the strongest terms, preferring even the want of religious profession to that condition which is described as being "neither cold nor hot." In Apostolic times this Church had Archippus (Col. iv. 17) as its bishop, who was also a martyr in the cause of Christ.

In all these Churches we see every condition of spiritual vigour and decay illustrated, and if we could only realize the ideal of a perfect Church, it would be by eliminating the defects, errors, and infirmities, for which these several Churches are censured, and combining the virtues and excellencies for which they are praised—blending, as the seven prismatic colours are united in a ray of pure light, all those varied qualities of spirituality, zeal, love, patience, faithfulness, perseverance, and service, which constitute the household of God what the Psalmist has so appositely designated it—"the Perfection of Beauty" (Ps. l. 2).

Ver. 12. *Καὶ ἐπέστρεψα βλέπειν τὴν φωνὴν ἥτις ἐλάλει μετ' ἐμοῦ· καὶ ἐπιστρέψας εἶδον ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς, and I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks* (*lampstands*). The instructions hitherto received by St. John were addressed to the ear—he heard the voice, but saw no man—now he turns in the direction from which the voice proceeds, and he sees, all of a sudden, a marvellous scene—seven golden candlesticks, or

lampbearers, separated the one from the other, with sufficient space between them to admit of a person passing. The Apostle was familiar with the golden candlestick in the Temple, which had its six branches, together with a central stem, constituting its seventh arm or lampstand; but these branches were all united. The lamps were supplied with oil which flowed through the tubes into the bowls; and all the lights were supported from one common source. Here, however, the lampstands were quite different. There does not appear to have been any connection between them. They were separate and distinct, and probably arranged in such a position as to be fit representations of the several Churches they were designed to symbolize. In the fact of these lampbearers being seven in number, we may consider them as indicating totality, or universality; and, in their separation, they may fitly represent the Churches of Christendom at large. The Church of the Jew was one, as the seven branches were all joined in the one golden candlestick. This was appositely symbolic of the Temple, which was the Church of one people or race; but here, under the New Testament dispensation, there are many Churches, because all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, are sharers in the blessings of a full and free salvation; yet all derive their support from Him who walks in the midst of the candlesticks, which have no oil or light in themselves, but give light only as they are supplied from the pure word of God by the influences of the Holy Spirit. In some the light is obscured, in others it burns brightly, just in proportion as the lamps are supplied with the pure oil of sound doctrine derived from the fountain of Revealed Truth; while, in a few instances, the light is all but extinct from the adulteration and corruption of the material which feeds the flame.

The lampstand, or candlestick, is a fit representation of what a Church should be. It is not to obscure the light, or

take its place, but to hold up the light to the world. The motto of the Waldensian Church is properly descriptive of what the office of the Church should be: "Lux lucet in tenebris." "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid," our Lord said to His disciples; and if it is true individually, it is not less so collectively. St. Paul uses the same metaphor in Phil. ii. 15, "Among whom ye shine as lights in the world." This too shows the condition of the world into which the light is thrown. The world is like Egypt during the plague of darkness, while the Church is like Goshen, where the children of Israel had light in their dwellings. But for the Church of God what would the world be? A waste howling wilderness, with no shadow of a rock in a weary land—a troubled sea casting forth mire and dirt, and no hope of crossing it, or reaching a haven. The Church is the world's regenerator. Like the branch thrown by the prophet into the waters of Marah, this "goodly vine" has neutralized the sources of man's misery, while it has purified the fountains of his joy. It has been a mighty breakwater to resist the flood of vice, sensuality, and crime; and, but for it, no embankment, constructed by human hands, could have withstood the pressure, and prevented the ruin in which the whole social fabric would have been involved. It stands above all human institutions, a witness for Christ in the world, the pillar and ground of the truth, proclaiming the power and triumphs of Christianity; a remembrancer from generation to generation that God has not left us to ourselves, but that the true Light, that enlighteneth every man who will receive it, has come to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

ἑπτὰ λυχνίας χρυσᾶς, *seven golden lampstands.* These candlesticks were of gold to denote the preciousness of everything connected with the Church, and, we may add,

the beauty of the Church and her holy services. "The hill of Zion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth." "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." Christ has purchased the Church with His own blood, and the price He has set upon it is far above rubies. He calls the Church by His own name; she is His bride, and He bestows upon her all the treasures of His grace. "For all things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." The Church is the admiration of the universe—not merely the source of peace and happiness to man, but the fountain of knowledge and enlightenment to the angels in heaven, whose views of their Creator are enlarged as they learn from the Church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. iii. 10). We may, therefore, see in the golden candlesticks, how perfectly the symbol corresponds to the thing signified.

Ver. 13. *καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον Υἱῷ ἀνθρώπου, ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη, καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσῆν, and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like the Son of man, clothed with a long garment reaching down to his feet, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.* Between the candlesticks, St. John saw one "like the Son of man." The article is omitted in the Greek, but the omission occurs in like phrases, *υἱὸς Θεοῦ, πνεῦμα Θεοῦ, τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου,* where obviously the translation requires the definite article to be supplied. The expression, "Son of man," is here one of two instances only, where, in the New Testament, this title is applied to Christ by any one but Himself. It is His own adopted designation, and is commonly used by Him in speaking of Himself, or addressing His disciples. St. John had been accustomed to hear it, and it comes up instinctively as the title of the Messiah. No doubt, in adopting this form of expression, our Lord had in view the prophecy of Dan. vii. 13, where the prophet tells us he "saw

in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven . . . and there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, and nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

When our blessed Lord was before Caiaphas and adjured to tell whether He was the Christ, He said: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." The Jews understood what the expression, "Son of man," meant. They knew that Messiahship was involved in the title, and claimed by Christ. Hence the high priest cried out, "He hath spoken blasphemy" (Matt. xxvi. 65). The name, *Son of man*, therefore, did not mean that our Lord was possessed of true humanity merely, though it also implied this, but that He was the Representative, and Pattern man—the Seed of the woman that should bruise the head of the serpent—the Head of the new creation, the only true and perfect flower that had ever sprung from the root of humanity—the Restorer of our race, the Second Adam, who should undo all that had been wrongly done by the first. But more than this, the title was a distinct claim to Messiahship. The Head of the kingdom that should arise after the four great monarchies had passed away, represented as they were by "the four beasts," descriptive of their true character, which was inhuman, was to be the Son of man. His sovereignty was to be humane,—"with righteousness He should judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth"; and, while His real humanity was indicated by the use of the title, it was in this character He would judge the world, for the Father hath given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of man. Even before our Lord's incarnation, the expression, "Son of man," was familiar to the Jews; for in the apocryphal Book of

Enoch, which critics have agreed was written in the second century before Christ, this title is frequently used as designating the Messiah.[1] By reason of Daniel's prophecy, it became a popular title of the Messiah, and those who were at all conversant with that prophecy must have at once understood it in this sense. When our Lord put the question to His disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" in marked contrast to the hesitation of the Jews, who, from prejudice, were slow in admitting the justice of the claim, St. Peter, as the mouthpiece of the Apostles, confesses: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." We therefore see that, even before our Lord appeared in the flesh, the title, Son of man, was known as the official name by which He should be designated as the long-expected Messiah, whose goings forth were of old from everlasting. And now in Patmos, when He is seen by St. John in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, He is at once recognised, as He was by the prophet of the Captivity, as "One like the Son of man."

ἐνδεδυμένον ποδηρη, *clothed with a long garment reaching down to His feet.* The garment is here called ποδήρη, which corresponds to the *chetoneth* described by Josephus *Antiquities*, Book iii. chap. 7, and which was a long loose garment flowing down to the feet, worn by the high priest. The word ποδήρης is used by the LXX. in Exod. xxviii. 4, to denote the robe of Aaron, the high priest, and which Moses was enjoined to make for him "for glory and for beauty." In the description of Daniel's vision (x. 5), which, in many respects, resembles that of St. John, we read that He whom he saw was clothed in linen, or a linen garment. This was the emblem of dignity, and specially belonged to royalty as well as priesthood. Jesus is now a Priest upon His throne, combining the power of royalty with the dignity of priest-

[1] See Canon Liddon's *Bampton Lectures*, Lect. i. p. 7.

hood—a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek; and we may conceive that the vision which the Apostle had in Patmos revealed Christ in that double aspect, not merely in His sacerdotal character, but as Head over all things to the Church, ruling over her, and in her, until that day when He shall come again, as the High Priest from within the veil, to bless the people, and proclaim the glad jubilee of the world's redemption from the curse, even the glorious liberty of the children of God.

καὶ περιεζωσμένον, κ.τ.λ., *and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.* The girdle was also one of the sacerdotal appendages. It was not however of gold, but only wrought with gold (Exod. xxviii. 8). It was used for binding the linen garment worn by the high priest. For ordinary purposes the girdle was worn round the loins, so as to collect the loose garments, and prevent them from being an obstruction in walking; but here the girdle is seen about the breasts; and Josephus, speaking of the vestment of the high priest, says, "it is girded to the breast, a little above the elbows, by a girdle often going round, four fingers broad, but so loosely woven that you would think it was the skin of a serpent."[1] This higher cincture gave more freedom, and enabled the priests to maintain more dignity. The girdle was an emblem of power and strength. St. Paul, speaking of the Christian's armour, mentions the need of having our loins girt about with truth; and Isaiah, predicting the Messiah, says: "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins" (Isa. xi. 5).

The girdle was as much the emblem of royalty as of priesthood, and was worn by kings as well as priests; so that, although the ποδήρης is rendered in the Rhemish version a priestly garment, it may denote any stately

[1] Joseph., *Ant.*, Book iii. chap. 7.

garment, and the cincture by a girdle may apply to either priest or king indiscriminately. The description given of our blessed Lord, as seen by the beloved Apostle, would convey to us the fact that Jesus wears His priesthood still, that He ever lives to make intercession, and that He is also a King upon His holy hill of Zion. He who has procured salvation for us, and who is now interceding as a Priest, was "made after the power of an endless life," so as to apply redemption, to make men "willing in the day of His power," to accomplish the number of God's elect, and to hasten His kingdom. He who once opened a way to the Father ever lives to keep it open, and through Him all impediments are removed. That sublime vision which St. John saw is to us an assurance that our Great High Priest has passed into the heavens, and is exalted to the seat of power and honour, from henceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool. Flesh and blood, in some glorified form, have been carried into the inner shrine of the upper sanctuary. How great the honour thus placed upon human nature! and if we are Christ's, such honour have all the saints. He is the pledge of safety to all His people. He has said, "Because I live ye shall live also." If He has entered into the august presence of His Father and our Father, of His God and our God, it is that He may remember the struggling Church in the wilderness, and uphold her weakest member. None need perish while He is within the veil. Attached to that curious girdle was the high priest's breastplate, on which were set twelve precious stones, to represent the twelve Hebrew tribes, so that, when intercession was made, He might as it were carry them on His heart before God. And does not Jesus, our great High Priest, bear all His people's wants, and cares, and anxieties, on His heart before God? "He fainteth not, neither is weary." Of His Church He says: "Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of My

hands: thy walls are continually before Me" (Isa. xlix. 16). We stand here waiting in the outer sanctuary; and as the worshippers in the outer court of the temple heard the tinkling bells of the high priest's vestments, which told them he was interceding, so may we now, from the Holy of Holies, with the ear of faith, catch the music of their sacred chimes, and enjoy the blessedness of those who know the joyful sound. His work will continue till "time, times, and the dividing of time," in restraining evil, presenting prayer, bestowing grace, keeping the feet of His saints, controlling the affairs of Providence; then shall the GREAT SABBATH come, when peace shall flow through every land like a river, and righteousness like the waves of the sea, when nature's harmonies shall be restored, the world's wastes reclaimed, creation's groaning no longer heard,—"violence no more heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates, Praise,"—and Christ shall reign, a Priest upon His throne, in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously (Isa. xxiv. 23).

Ver. 14. ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν, ὡς χιών· καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρὸς, *and His head and His hair were white as white wool, as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire.* The description here given corresponds exactly with that which Daniel gives of the Ancient of Days (Dan. vii. 9, x. 6), and which would seem to indicate eternal duration, or perhaps more properly to express the glory of Christ's Godhead. We can hardly regard this whiteness, which the Apostle desires to intensify by selecting wool and snow as its symbols, to be indicative of age, or of the decay which accompanies it; for this would be inadmissible in speaking of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting, with whom one day is as a thousand years and a

thousand years as one day, who gathers as into a point all the duration of human history, and who is the mighty centre of two eternities. Solomon speaks of the hoary head as a crown of glory, and it is always associated with honour and respect. But we must attach some other meaning to the appearance here described, as it would be an incongruity to apply the symbol of age to one who had just risen from the dead, and who would be in the full vigour of youth and immortality. In Christ there could be neither weakness nor decay, for as the Psalmist in the 110th Psalm, when alluding to the Messiah as the Ruler of His people in the Gospel dispensation, says, "Thou hast the dew of Thy youth," thus showing that Christ's strength and activity continue unimpaired, refreshed and renewed by the dew of God's grace and Spirit; or that His body is constantly refreshed and strengthened by successive accessions of people, as dew from the morning. The angel at the sepulchre, as described by St. Mark (xvi. 5), is spoken of as a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; how much more then are youth and vigour applicable to Him who is the angels' Lord? The head and hair white as wool and snow would properly recall the transfiguration scene, when His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment white as the light; St. Mark says, "exceeding white as snow." If the transfiguration scene foreshadowed His glory after His decease, St. John, who had been an eye-witness of that scene, must have had it vividly impressed upon his memory; and now that the Lord appears to him with all the brightness, radiance, and intense splendour which he had observed on Hermon, he must have had no difficulty in recognising his risen and ascended Saviour, and in fully understanding what the transfiguration was intended to convey. He is the specially favoured Apostle, and while St. Peter and St. James were admitted to one glimpse of the heavenly glory, he was privileged to have the vision repeated

for his special support and encouragement in Patmos. In the days of His flesh, Christ had given him a manifestation of the glory of His Divine Person, to prepare him for the dark scenes of His sufferings and of His death; now the glory of the risen and exalted Saviour is again brought before him to quicken his faith and strengthen his hope, when banished from the Church he loved, and to make him feel that "though persecuted he was not forsaken, cast down, he was not destroyed,"—that, in the hour of his deepest gloom, there was One present who could say, "Fear not, for I am with thee."

καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ, κ.τ.λ., and His eyes were as a flame of fire. This indicates the powerful, penetrating, all-searching glance of Christ, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." In the address to the Church at Thyatira (Rev. ii. 18) this attribute of Christ is alluded to, and is there designed to inspire awe by the thought that nothing can be concealed from His view; indeed, in ii. 23, He explains the purport of the symbol here used by saying, "And all the Churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and the hearts." But the words of this passage show not merely that Christ's eyes are so searching that nothing can escape His notice; they have a still deeper meaning, and a more judicial application. Fire, in most places where it is mentioned in Scripture, is indicative of indignation and wrath against sin. Perhaps the only exception is where our Lord is spoken of as baptizing with the Holy Ghost and with fire; there indicating the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost in tongues of fire. "Eyes, as a flame of fire," signify that withering condemnation of sin to which He, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, always in dealing with Churches or individuals gives expression. Sin cannot stand in His

presence, and wherever it appears it calls forth His righteous indignation. In this case the adversaries of the Church were Domitian and the power of heathen Rome; and those Eyes, which the Apostle compares to a flame of fire, were indicative of retribution against that power, and of the speedy overthrow of the Church's enemies.

In chapter xix. 11, 12, where Christ is represented as "judging and making war" upon His enemies, it is immediately added in connection with that execution of judgment, "His eyes are as a flame of fire."

Ver. 15. *καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένοι, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the voice of many waters.* In Daniel's vision by the river Hiddekel (x. 6) He whom he saw, who was clothed in linen, and whose loins were girt with fine gold of Uphaz, and whose eyes were as lamps of fire, had arms and feet like in colour to polished brass; and in Ezekiel's vision (i. 7) the feet of the living creatures "sparkled like the colour of burnished brass." The word *χαλκολιβάνῳ* has afforded scope for much investigation by critics, as its etymology is involved in doubt. It occurs only twice in the New Testament, and in both places in the Revelation; here, and in ii. 18. We know that *χαλκὸς* means *brass*, but what *λιβανός* means is the difficulty. Perhaps it corresponds to the Hebrew לָבַן, to be white; but to what the allusion is there is a variety of opinion. As St. John has clearly in view the description given by Daniel, we may be safe in following the Hebrew analogy, and construe the word as meaning *shining brass*, or molten brass in a state of incandescence in a furnace. The light from brass molten in a furnace is insupportable, and it may be fitly used as an image of that dazzling brightness with which the feet of the

Saviour shone, and which St. John compares to χαλκολιβάνος. The Vulgate renders the word *aurichalcum*, or *orichalcum*, an alloy of gold and brass. Some think that the last half of the word (λιβανὸς) should be detached from the first, and construed as a proper name, to mean "Lebanon," and that the whole word would then mean, "brass of Lebanon," or mountain brass. Wordsworth conjectures that the word λιβανὸς may be taken to mean *frankincense*, and that the reference is to copper in a state of ignition, like frankincense when it is red hot. Trench makes the word a hybrid, the first half Greek, and the second Hebrew, the word λιβανὸς being taken from the Hebrew לָבָן (laban) white; the entire word would then mean, brass in a state of white heat. There is great objection to this, as it is a very unusual thing to have such a combination, except perhaps in proper names. If then a Greek word could be found from which λιβανὸς could be derived, it would be preferable, and Wordsworth has suggested that it might come from λείβω (liquo), and that the word would then mean, liquid or molten brass. This finds acceptance from the words which follow, "as if they burned in a furnace"; and, considering the variety of views which have been advanced, we may regard this derivation as conveying the meaning of the passage as fully as any other, besides being in closer analogy with the requirements of the language.

The description here given seems to indicate judgment, just as the preceding clause was expressive of indignation against the Lord's adversaries. In Isaiah lxiii. 1, the question is put, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" and in the answer it is said, "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Me: for I will *tread them* in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury." In Malachi iv. 2, 3, reference is also made to this mode of executing judgment: "Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall

tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet." We may, therefore, consider the imagery here introduced as denoting the power with which Christ should subdue His enemies, and bring deliverance to His oppressed and down-trodden servants.

καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, *and His voice as the voice of many waters.* This is descriptive of majesty and authority. Next to the power and majesty of the voice of the Lord in the loud thunder-peal we may regard the deep sound of the waters of the sea. In Daniel x. 6, the imagery used is less in grandeur than that here introduced. "And the voice of His words, like the voice of a multitude," does not give the same idea of overwhelming majesty and might as the voice of the far-sounding sea. Ezekiel has adopted the latter symbol (xliii. 2) when, speaking of the glory of the God of Israel, he says: "His voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shined with His glory." When, at the cave of Horeb, the Lord appeared to Elijah, there was the wind that rent the mountains, then the earthquake, and the fire,—but the Lord was not in these,—and, after the fire, a still small voice. He came to give strength and a fresh commission to His servant, to confirm the hands that were hanging down and the feeble knees; therefore that voice was the voice of love and mercy. And when the Lord Jesus Christ went forth on His mission of love to the souls of men, the spirit of Prophecy had declared respecting Him: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets." Unlike the ostentatious Pharisees, His demeanour was calm, yet dignified; His preaching earnest, yet unobtrusive. But now, when He comes to the Apostle in Patmos, His voice is as the voice of many waters—solemn and deep, loud and penetrating. It is not the gentle voice which was lifted up in pity, pleading for the Jews, His countrymen: "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have

life"; not the voice which spoke in accents of sorrow as He saw Jerusalem for the last time, "How often would I have gathered thee, but ye would not"; nor was it the voice that woke the dead at the gates of Nain, or brought back Lazarus from his tomb. It is the voice of judgment addressing impenitent sinners, carrying in its deep tones alarm to the conscience, and conveying a sense of remorse to those who have set themselves against Christ, alike to false friends and open foes, to whom nothing remains but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. However much His rebellious subjects may rise against Him, and however loud their hard sayings, the voice of Christ is irresistible, for He shall "smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked" (Isa. xi. 4).

Ver. 16. *καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ χειρὶ ἀστέρας ἑπτά, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ*, *and he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp twoedged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.* The appearance presented to St. John was that of seven stars, held in the right hand of the august Personage whom he saw. We are not informed how these stars were arranged, whether in the form of a circlet, or coronet, or whether their order bore any analogy to the position of the Churches over which these stars exercised an influence. Their number and symbolic character are explained in verse 20, as indicating the Angels of the seven Churches; but in the fact of these stars being in the hand of Christ there was conveyed the instructive and comforting assurance that, whatever evils might betide the suffering Church, those who, like the Apostle, were called upon to endure persecution for righteousness' sake, might rely upon

the arm of Omnipotence for protection and support. Indeed the same assurance is given to every member of Christ's flock, as well as to those who are shepherds and overseers: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any one snatch them out of My hand." Though that hand was pierced on the Cross, it was not palsied, nor has it lost its life-giving touch. "The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save."

If the soldiers of the Cross could only realize this in their conflicts with the powers of darkness, with what fresh vigour should they go forth, and with how many victories would they be crowned! But in looking to ourselves, instead of Christ, we become weak in the day of battle, and the enemy easily gains the advantage over us. "Who is sufficient for these things?" we frequently exclaim, while we overlook the answer to this question which the Apostle of the Gentiles has given: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." All the light which those stars emit comes from Him who is the Sun of Righteousness, and they are preserved in their orbits by the attractive influence of that Great Central Sun.

καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος, κ.τ.λ., and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword. In the character of our Great High Priest, He will also be our Judge. The sharp two-edged sword is the symbol of rigid justice. It will pierce us through; it will reach not merely our outward acts but our inward motives; it will lay bare the inmost secrets, our thoughts and purposes, as well as those acts of transgression we have committed; it will take cognisance no less of the spirit than of the letter; and with righteous judgment to each will be apportioned either stern retribution or gracious reward. So we read in Hebrews iv. 12: "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing

asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

If by "the Word of God" we are here to understand the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, which many of the Apostolic Fathers held, among whom were SS. Clement[1] and Polycarp,[2] we have a practical exposition of the symbol which St. John saw when he speaks of the sharp two-edged sword that proceeded out of Christ's mouth. The two-edged sword was used by barbarous nations for punitive purposes; so the sword by which Christ shall execute punishment upon His enemies is the Divine Word which proceeds from His mouth—the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and which, while it exercises a convincing and converting power upon His people, will carry dismay and destruction to His enemies. In the word δίστομος (two-edged) Tertullian recognises a spiritual meaning, for he applies it to the Old and New Testaments,[3] as does also Richard of St. Victor as quoted by Trench: "It is called a sword with two edges, because in the Old Testament it cuts into fleshly deformities; in the New Testament, also into spiritual. It is sharp on both sides, because externally it removes the lust of the flesh, internally the malice of the heart. It is sharp on both sides because it punishes in body and soul those who reject its precepts. It is a sharp sword with two edges because it distinguishes between good and bad, and renders to each one his deserts."

καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ, κ.τ.λ., *and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.* There could be no more sublime symbol of majesty and power than that which is here in-

[1] Clement, *Epist. ad Corinth.*, sec. 21.

[2] Polycarp, *Ep. ad Phil.*, sec. 4.

[3] Tertullian (*c. Marcion*, iii. 14) thus writes on this passage: "The Apostle St. John in the Apocalypse describes a sword coming forth from the mouth of God, with two edges and sharp at the point, which is the Word of God sharpened with the two edges of the two Testaments—the Law and the Gospel."

troduced. It is that by which the glory of Christ in His Transfiguration is depicted : " His face did shine as the sun." Here it is, " as the sun shineth in his strength," without any intercepting clouds. The same figure is used in the Song of Deborah to describe the power and glory of those who love the Lord : " But let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might " (Judg. v. 31). So also at His Second Advent, " the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father " (Matt. xiii. 43). What a wonderful contrast have we in this place to our Lord's humiliation ! Then He was a worm and no man—His visage marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men—the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. Then the glory of His Divine person was veiled with the thick folds of His humanity, because He came to bear our infirmities and carry the burden of our sins. He took upon Him the form of a servant, and came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. On the morning of His resurrection all that life of humiliation and suffering had passed away, and at the open tomb, it is said of the angel who stood there, " his countenance was as lightning " ; what must then have been the overpowering splendour of the countenance of Him who was the angel's Lord ? All these symbols which are here introduced to describe the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to St. John are purely mental conceptions. They passed before the mind's eye of the Apostle as ideal representations, not as the actual glorified body of the Son of God. That glorified body the heavens have received, and shall retain, until the final revelation—the glorious appearing—when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor would it be possible for any mortal to behold the glory of Christ on His mediatorial throne. Not until this

mortal shall have put on immortality can we be adapted for that sight which we shall have of Him "Whom having not seen we love." It is sufficient for us here to be instructed that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is; and we are assured by St. Peter that the dazzling glory of the Transfiguration scene, which the Apocalyptic vision so closely resembled, was a representation of the future power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. i. 16-18), and that the glorified humanity of Jesus is to be the pattern of our bodies at the resurrection (Phil. iii. 21), and that we shall then no longer see in a mirror dimly, but face to face; that when that great change, described by St. Paul as "bearing the image of the heavenly," shall come to all Christ's believing people, we shall not merely in some visionary or transcendental sense, but *actually and literally* behold the Saviour's face in righteousness, and be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.

Ver. 17. *καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτὸν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός· καὶ ἔθηκε τὴν δεξιὰν αὐτοῦ ἐπ' ἐμὲ λέγων, Μὴ φοβοῦ, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, and when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last.* It is impossible for human eyes to behold the Divine glory. When the Lord appeared to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, Saul was smitten with blindness from that intense light which encircled him, and both he and all who accompanied him fell to the earth, and for three days he was without sight, and did neither eat nor drink. On mortal eyes such has ever been the effect of a vision of the glory of Christ. Was not this so in the case of Ezekiel (i. 28), when he saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord"?

And when a similar vision was vouchsafed to Daniel, which caused his companions to quake from fear, and flee to hide

themselves, do we not find that even of Daniel, "the man greatly beloved," it is said, "there remained no strength in him, for his comeliness was turned in him to corruption, and he retained no strength" (Dan. x. 6-8)? This near approach of Deity has ever had the effect of impressing men with a deep sense of their sinfulness, and the impossibility of the sinner's standing in the presence of that purity and holiness, before which even the very angels veil their faces, while they adore, with deep reverence, the thrice Holy God. The nearness of Deity has always had an humbling effect. Even in the case of the most experienced Christian, he feels, in the presence of God, how many are his shortcomings. The last words of Archbishop Usher were: "O Lord, forgive me, especially my sins of omission!" The more we know of God and Christ, the more we feel remains to be known. Of the best it can only be said with St. Paul: "Not as though I had already attained." Even through eternity we may be acquiring fresh accessions of knowledge respecting the manifestations of God, ever approaching, like that beautiful line, the asymptote in relation to its curve, nearer and nearer in knowledge, in holiness, in perfection to God, yet never reaching the perfection of the Infinite and the Absolute. The effect of the wonderful vision upon St. John exhibits the exact working of every soul that is conscious of its sinfulness when brought into contact with God. So Jacob, when he awoke from his sleep at Bethel, exclaimed: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not;" and afterwards when he wrestled with the angel at the ford Jabbok: "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."

The unholy cannot bear the presence of the holy, nor would heaven be a place of happiness to an unholy man. He would be in an element that was not adapted to him, nor he to it. And even those who are God's own children feel an awful dread in standing face to face with God. Was not this the

beloved disciple, he who leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, and said: "Lord which is he that betrayeth thee?" Was it not the disciple to whom Christ on the Cross said: "Son, behold thy mother,"—the disciple whose eyes had seen, and whose hands had handled, the Word of Life—and yet, who after beholding the vision we have already described, tells us: "When I saw Him (Christ) I fell at His feet as one dead"?

καὶ ἔθηκε τὴν δεξιὰν, κ.τ.λ., and he laid his right hand upon me, saying: Fear not, I am the first and the last. These words must have fallen upon the Apostle's ears like oil on a surging sea. They must have spoken peace to his soul, and have been an antidote to his fears and misgivings. Fear not, trembling, troubled one. I have redeemed thee—thou art Mine; when thou passest through the waters of affliction, I will be with thee. Fear not, thou faint-hearted and weary one, My grace shall be sufficient for thee and My strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness. Fear not, tempted, tried and suffering disciple, a sojourner in a strange land,—thine earthly peace and blessings removed—heart and flesh may fail, but I am the strength of thy heart and thy portion for ever. Fear not thou who art now expecting death at the hands of the persecutor. I am He that liveth and was dead. I have fought and conquered Death on his own dark and dismal territory; and when death comes, like a cold ghastly shade moving on the midnight air, thou shalt hear My voice, mightier than the voice of many waters, and feel the touch of a sustaining hand—lost to sight but present to faith—enabling thee to go on thy way rejoicing, until thou hast safely reached that happy resting-place, out of which no friend can ever depart, and into which no enemy can ever enter, there to be a trophy of My cross, and a partner with Me in My crown and kingdom.

And He laid His right hand upon me, etc. The right hand is the hand of strength, and by the touch of that hand the

Apostle's strength is regained. That right hand had been stretched out to rescue the sinking disciple, St. Peter, when he had ventured to walk on the water to meet Jesus. It had been stretched out over the troubled waves of the Sea of Galilee, and smoothed them, calm as the placid lake in summer. It had touched the bier on which the widow's son was being carried out for interment, and had delivered him to his mother. It had fashioned the worlds, and was still upholding them, and there was virtue in its touch. It was an angel touched the prophet at Beersheba, and gave him vigour to go on, forty days and forty nights, until he came to Horeb, the Mount of God; but here the Lord of Life puts forth His hand, and the Seer of Patmos receives fresh vigour and strength for the work he has yet to do.

I am the first and the last. This claim is expressive of absolute and eternal Godhead. Christ is the First, as by Him all things were created which are in heaven and earth; whether there be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers, all were created by Him and for Him. He is not, as the Arians pretend, one of a series of created beings between God and man, the First in rank of that order; but He was begotten before all creation. He is the εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, *the image of the invisible God*, the reflection of God in Himself, and the medium of revelation to His creatures. Thus Christ is First as the Creator, for before Him there was no creative process; and all things were created for Him, not for a superior Being, for He and the Father are one,—"the exact likeness of the Father in every respect, except being the Father." He was before all things, and by Him all things consist. That creative force which summoned all things out of nothing, into being, and which sustains all things, was His. In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. All the attributes, virtues, energies, which belonged to Deity were in Christ. God the Father

is the source of all life, while the production of created beings depends immediately upon the Son.

He is First, not only as Creator, but He is First in honour and dignity, although that is not what this declaration of Christ was intended to convey: Last in humiliation, lowest in profound suffering and shame, dying the agonizing, ignominious and cursed death of the Cross. This expression, "the first and the last," is used three times in Isaiah (xli. 4; xliv. 6; xlviii. 12), and it also occurs three times in the Revelation. It clearly indicates that Christ was from eternity, and that He shall endure to eternity, the glorious Head and originating Cause of all creation, and the final Cause to which all creation tends; for the ultimate end of all creation is the service and glory of Him who called it into being. It is beside the question to say that Christ is called "the Firstborn of every creature," and that it is in this respect He is first, because He stands at the head of all created intelligences. The passage in Colossians i. 15, does not admit of such an interpretation, for the context assigns the reason why Christ is πρωτότοκος, namely, because He was before all things and by Him all things consist; and the meaning of the word is not "firstborn of all creation," but *born before all creation*, or, born before every creature. The same construction of πρῶτος with a genitive case is in John i. 30, πρῶτός μου ἦν, *He was before me*, so that πρωτότοκος bears the interpretation, born before the whole creation. On the passage under consideration Richard of St. Victor writes: "Christ was the First on account of creation, the Last by reason of suffering; the First, because before Him there was no God formed, the Last, because after Him there shall be no other; the First, because from Him are all things, the Last, because to Him all things return." Justin Martyr[1] says, that "the Word is the Firstborn of God, and is God." Clement of Alexandria[2]

[1] Just. Mart., *Ap.*, 83. [2] Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, v. 14.

speaks of Him as being the Author and Archetype of all existing beings; and Irenæus,[1] the disciple of Polycarp says: "None is directly called God save God the Father of all things, and His Son Jesus Christ. In both Testaments Christ is preached as God and Lord, as the King eternal, as the Only Begotten, as the Word Incarnate;" and he sums up the argument in defence of Christ's Godhead by saying: "If Christ is worshipped, if Christ forgives sins, if Christ is Mediator between God and man, this is because He is really a Divine person." The Apocalypse is full of imagery as well as direct statements bearing upon the Divine character of our Lord. He is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End of all existence. His name is called "the Word of God," as in the Gospel He is called the Word in the beginning. The name on His vesture and on His thigh is "King of kings and Lord of lords." Now what do these expressions mean? Are they designed to teach that, in the strict and proper sense, Christ is not absolutely and essentially the true God and Eternal Life? No, on the contrary, they all unite in conveying to us the one important truth that, from everlasting to everlasting, Jesus Christ is God, and that we may therefore feel confidence in reposing upon Him who is "mighty to save."[2]

Ver. 18. *καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς, καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾅδου, and the Living One; and I was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.* Christ is the Living One, not merely as opposed to the lifeless deities of the heathen, or the impersonal *τὸ πᾶν* of the Pantheist, but the self-existent source and spring of universal life. The life which is in God is an underived life;

[1] Iren., *Adv. Hær.*, iii. 19, 22, 2.

[2] See Canon Liddon's *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 312–323.

it comes forth from itself, and passes again into itself. It is Being, originating, creating, and bestowing life upon countless orders and intelligences, and returning into itself as the object upon which it finds perfect pleasure and satisfaction. As God the Father has life in Himself, so hath He also given to the Son to have life in Himself. The same underived life which was in God the Father is equally in Christ, so that Christ is the source and supply of life to others. "In Christ was life, and His life was the light of men." He proclaims Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What creature could apply such words to himself? or who could claim absolute life in himself but Christ; for what have we that we have not received? Owing to that consubstantiality between the Father and the Son, Christ could proclaim Himself as the Resurrection and the Life, and declare that he that had seen Him had seen the Father; not that Christ was the Father, as the Patropassians alleged, but because of Christ's co-equality with the Father. On this passage St. Chrysostom says: "He who sees My Divine substance sees the substance of the Father. Whence it is clear that Christ is not a creature, for they who see the creature see not God. Christ is therefore consubstantial with the Father." All life is the gift of Christ, and Christ is therefore called the Word of Life (1 John i. 1), the Logos whose essence is Life. It was Christ's object to manifest this life as well as to communicate it. Life, and love, and light constituted the πληρώμα, or fulness which dwelt in Christ, of which His disciples have received. Of Christ it may be said as in Psalm xxxvi. 9, "For with Thee is the Fountain of Life: in Thy light shall we see light." As God, He is the Fountain of Life, for all created life has proceeded from Him. This St. Paul, in his speech before the Athenians, took occasion to inform the benighted Agnostics, when he quoted one of their poets (Aratus): "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your

own poets have said, For we are also His offspring." All derived life proceeds from Christ, and depends for its maintenance upon Him, whether we view it physically or spiritually. Life in Christ is *personal* life. All life is not represented here as proceeding from a great boundless expanse, and each individual unit of existence as coming from this great ocean and returning to it again. Pantheistic ideas of God are quite inconsistent with what our blessed Lord here describes Himself, and the Living One. Pantheism makes God and the universe one, and regards all manifestations of outward activity and life as expressions of the working of this speculative deity, if we can apply this term to an impersonality. The Pantheist's notion is that the aggregate of life is God, life in the plant, life in the animal, or the higher life in man. We can find no place for personality in the Pantheist's God, no consciousness, no memory, no will. And it is singular that, while we recognise personal existence here, and beings endowed with personal faculties, yet, on the Pantheist's hypothesis, the source of life must have communicated to others what it did not itself possess! In this view of God we see no room for morality—no distinction between good and evil. We hear not the voice of the Lord by the prophet saying: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. iii. 10, 11). Yet the Pantheistic theory is plausible. It tells us that what once exists can never cease to exist, and therefore holds out the hope of immortality; but it is an immortality which, to all intents and purposes, is no better than non-existence; for if the soul loses all its powers—if the Ego, that which distinguishes one from another—if personal identity be lost, what good can there be in the prolongation of existence? what greater benefit to continue in endless life than to become finally and for

ever annihilated? To all who know the power of Christ's resurrection, how different the prospect, how infinitely brighter the hope! "Because I live," says Christ, "ye shall live also" —not in some impersonal unconscious condition, but as partakers of the Divine nature, and as sharers with Him in the happiness of a personal immortality; that which the patriarch of Uz, with the eye of faith, looked forward to, when he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another" (Job xix. 25–27). And what was the hope of the Apostle of the Gentiles when he was about to lay down his life in exchange for the martyr's crown?— "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 8).

καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς, καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, κ.τ.λ. This applies strictly to Christ's death and resurrection. St. John had been an eyewitness of the Crucifixion, and was one of the two disciples who went, at the dawn of the first day of the week, and who had seen the empty grave. He had seen Christ after His resurrection, and had heard his Lord's answer to St. Peter, when he asked respecting the beloved disciple, "Lord and what shall this man do?"—"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me" (John xxi. 21, 22). The Resurrection of Christ was the grand central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole weight of Christianity depends. It is like the keystone to the arch, like the central sun to the solar system. If it was essential for Christ to die to save the world, it was equally necessary that He should rise again from the dead to prove Himself a Saviour. If He died to purchase redemption—to give His life a *λύτρον*

(ransom) for many—He rose again in order that He might live to apply the benefits of that purchase to the souls of His people. To this great fact our Lord frequently pointed His disciples during the period of His personal Ministry; and, after His resurrection, when one was chosen to fill up the gap left by Judas, the object of this election was, that "one must be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts i. 22). What is the evidence upon which our Lord's resurrection rests? In this age of myths and misbeliefs, it is needful that the Christian should thoroughly see that he is following no cunningly devised fable, but that the evidence upon which his faith stands is sufficient to support that faith amid all the chances and changes of time. In every Christian's own bosom there is an all powerful evidence. He may not be able to enter into and appreciate all the external evidences which may be appealed to in order to convince the gainsayer, but he can say with the blind man whose eyes the Lord opened—"Whether Christ be a sinner or no, I know not; but one thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see." Happy are they who thus have experimental evidence, who know in their hearts the joy and peace in believing; who have not sought for the touch required by the incredulous disciple, but who enjoy the blessedness of those who, having not seen yet have believed. What have Christianity and its great Author done for me? Do I know Him? Am I found in Him not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith? Am I living to magnify Him in life and in death, and have I the calm assured hope of living with Him hereafter? But there are people who are differently constituted, who will not be satisfied unless they can have all their doubts and misgivings removed, and whose rule is, "Prove all things, and doubt all things until they be proved." Among men of this class was our Lord's disciple, St. Thomas, and the Lord graciously condescended to his

weakness "for the more confirmation of the faith," and gave him the proof of His resurrection which he required, after receiving which he exclaimed "My Lord and my God!" There is one case of conversion to Christianity on record to which every doubting inquirer should refer, namely, that of St. Paul. We ask how it was that Saul of Tarsus, when going to Damascus to persecute the Christians, suddenly became converted? He was a Pharisee, an able dialectician, a man of influence, of means, and education, and one not favourably disposed to the despised sect of the Nazarenes—he was one capable of weighing evidence, and not likely to be imposed upon; and we should sooner expect the high priest to descend from his palace, and cast in his lot with the persecuted followers of Jesus, than this cruel, blood-thirsty, blaspheming murderer, who was mad with passion against the Christians. Why did he suddenly lose that savage nature, that cruel taste for blood, and become a preacher of the Cross? He tells us in 1 Corinthians xv. 8, and ix. 1—"Have not I seen Christ Jesus the Lord?" He proclaims himself a witness of the resurrection. He was thoroughly convinced that Christ had actually spoken to him on his way to Damascus; and in proof of that firm persuasion regarding the truth of our Lord's resurrection, he went and preached that gospel which he once endeavoured to destroy.

When our Lord appeared to His scattered followers on the morning of the resurrection day, could it have been a dream, or a vision? If there had been only an appearance to one, such might be possible; but there were *five* distinct appearances on the day of the resurrection. For forty days He manifested Himself; He was seen of the disciples in breaking of bread—by the way—in the city—by the side of the Lake—in Galilee, by 500 at once—they talked to Him, and He to them—they ate with Him, they saw His face, they knew the familiar voice,—they saw He was no spirit;—in His resur-

rection body He gave them tangible proofs when He said, "handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have,"—and at the end of the forty days He ascended in their presence from "the Mount called Olivet" to heaven.

What followed? The Holy Ghost, according to His promise, was sent on the Day of Pentecost to bestow the miraculous gift of tongues. What caused the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week? Surely what had been observed from the creation of the world, and had become one of the most sacred of the Jewish ordinances, could not have undergone a change so suddenly without sufficient grounds. What was the cause of the establishment of a Christian Church upon earth? It could not have arisen without some all-powerful impulse. The two or three humble followers of the despised Nazarene could not have accomplished the "turning of the world upside down," unless there was power given them from on high. And then when we look at the lives of the Apostles—all, excepting the aged disciple of Patmos, after testifying to the fact of our Lord's resurrection, laying down their lives in defence of what they had believed and taught—surely we have such evidence as carries with it overwhelming conviction, and if we are not persuaded by it, neither would we be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Christ then appeared to St. John more than thirty years after the last of the witnesses of the resurrection in the person of St. Paul had passed away. He might feel, like Elijah, that he was left alone, unbefriended, and helpless; that Jesus whom he had seen go away from Mount Olivet was still within the folds of that ascending cloud, and while a spectator of the trials and sufferings of His disciple, was too far removed to bring him relief; but Christ once more reveals Himself to him, as he had proclaimed Himself at the grave of Lazarus, "The

Resurrection and the Life." "I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over Him." He still lives, and because He lives, our prayers are presented before God; because He lives, our daily infirmities and transgressions are forgiven; because He lives, the door of heaven is kept open and the repentant sinner may find access, for over its archway is written, "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture." Because He lives, we can calmly await the issues of life, and meet the last enemy in the mortal struggle, not as an adversary, but a friend sent to unbar the prison gates which surround us, and set free the emancipated spirit, to find a shelter and home in His bosom, until the day shall dawn and the shadows flee away, when He shall have swallowed up death in victory.

καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς, κ.τ.λ., *and I have the keys of death and of Hades.* In the Revised Version the reading is properly changed into "of death and of Hades," which appears more in harmony with the nature of things. It is death which contributes to the filling up of the unseen world, and day by day multitudes are borne thither to swell the myriad throng. Of death and Hades, Christ holds the keys. By His victory over natural death, He proved His power and authority, of which the keys are the emblem; and in every soul which is reclaimed from the thraldom of Satan, He asserts His power over spiritual death.

During our Lord's ministry, He exercised lifegiving power over three individuals who had been claimed by Death as his trophies; and by His own glorious resurrection, we are told, "He destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 14, 15). And now, by His word and Spirit, He is robbing

the prince of darkness of his spoils, and opening up the kingdom of heaven to all believers. When we think on the triumphs of the Cross, during the past, we may well exclaim: "What hath God wrought"! Each land retrieved from barbarism—each soul quickened and converted, sanctified and saved—is evidence that the keys are still in Christ's hands, that He openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth. Multitudes now live to bear testimony to the moral conquests of Him who, in the words of Richter, "being the Holiest among the mighty, and Mightiest among the holy, has lifted with His pierced hand empires off their hinges, has turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages." Every effort made to check the spread of Christianity and to extinguish the name of its Founder has only recoiled disastrously upon the assailants, and given fresh strength to the cause they sought to destroy. Porphyry, and Celsus, and Julian, strove in past times, to overthrow the City of God, but the Stone of Stumbling fell upon them, and crushed them to powder. Nor will it be otherwise now in these last days. While the keys are in the hands of the Son of God, it needs no prophet to predict the perpetuity of spiritual life in the world.

Christ has also the keys of Hades. This word corresponds to שְׁאוֹל (*Sheol*) in the Old Testament, and never in any passage does it mean the final abode of the reprobate. In the New Testament it is used to denote the place of disembodied spirits, or the unseen world. Now we profess in the Creed to believe in the descent of Christ into hell, and in Art. III. "As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also is it to be believed, that He went down into Hell." In Ps. xvi. David says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption;" and in Acts ii. St. Peter tells us that this passage refers prophetically to Christ: so that when we declare our belief

in the descent of Christ into hell, or Hades, it is important to understand what is meant by it. By the word Hades, we are to understand the place of departed spirits, whether good or bad ; to the one class, a state of bliss and peace—a foretaste of heaven—the complete happiness of which will be realized at the Resurrection ; to the other, a place of restraint and anguish, and also a foretaste of that greater woe which awaits the ungodly. In the unseen world there are two states or conditions : Paradise, into which the soul of Christ entered after its separation from the body, and Gehenna, where the souls of the ungodly remain until the General Resurrection. These two states are separated from each other by an impassable gulf, as we read in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The place of eternal torment, which is spoken of as the second death, has never yet had, and will not receive any, occupants until after the Great Day. Disembodied spirits do not enter at death into that perfect glory to which after the Resurrection they shall attain. Hades is not in itself a place of happiness or misery ; yet those who enter it must be either happy or miserable according to what their lives have been here. Lazarus was comforted, while the rich man was tormented. The dying malefactor was with Christ in Paradise that very day on which his body was left hanging on the cross, a deformed spectacle, showing to men and to angels that he was not fit to live. The felicity which will arise to the righteous between death and the resurrection, will proceed from a sense of God's favour, and the everlasting security of God's preservation against external foes ; and the misery of the wicked in Hades will proceed from remorse of conscience —from memory reminding them of what they might have been, had they been wise in time—and possibly from a sense of anticipation of their final doom ; and if they are not excluded from seeing beyond that gulf—as the rich man saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom—the comfort and safety of the

blessed, from the enjoyment of which they are for ever shut out,—this will in itself be an aggravation of their sufferings.

There is one passage bearing on this subject in 1 Peter iii. 18, where we read of Christ having gone and preached to the spirits in prison during the interval between His having been "put to death in the flesh," and His resurrection. This has received a variety of interpretations, as well in early as in modern times. The obvious reading of the passage would lead one to believe that Christ went in spirit, *i.e.* without any instrumentality of the body, and preached to the spirits of those who were shut in Hades, in safe keeping, but who had been disobedient in the days of Noah. Why did Christ preach to them, and for what purpose? Did He proclaim the gospel to them with the object of leading them to repentance? A very able writer[1] has recently answered this question in the affirmative, and has adduced Matthew xii. 32, to prove that repentance, reconciliation, and salvation are admissible in Hades, and that the special proclamation of peace to the souls of the antediluvian sinners would in equity demand the communication of it to all who have not heard it here. But it might be asked, how could this view be reconciled with what our Lord says in Luke xvi. 26, about a great gulf fixed, so as to prevent any communication between the two portions of Hades? Read also John ix. 4; Heb. iii. 13; ix. 27. All the calls to repentance, which the Scriptures contain, are addressed only to those who are in the flesh—we find none speaking of repentance and salvation beyond the grave. οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι, οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι has been suggested as implying eternal hope; but this expression is a Hebraism for *nunquam*.[2] In the parallel passage in St.

[1] Dean Reichel, *Serm. Ch. of Eng. Pulpit*, vol. xii. p. 145.

[2] ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος corresponds to the Messianic age, just as ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι, refers to the time that follows the Second Advent, and the phrase combined may be regarded as a Hebraism equivalent to *semper*, as in Ephesians i. 21.

Mark, we read *he hath never forgiveness* (Mark iii. 29). St. Mark explains what St. Matthew has expressed enigmatically. The view taken by the writer alluded to above is not unlike that of Origen, one of whose heresies was that, after many ages, all sinners should obtain pardon. How then is the preaching of our Lord to the spirits in prison to be explained? We know neither the subject matter of Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison, nor do we know of any results which followed. We are not told of any of the people during the 120 years in which the ark was in building, having been saved, except Noah and his family. By Christ's going in Spirit, and preaching to the spirits in prison, may it not have been with the design of making known His power and triumph over death and Satan, to all disembodied spirits? Besides, the circumstances of the antediluvians were unique. A similar condition can never occur again, for God has given us the assurance that He will never again destroy the earth by a flood of waters. Dean Alford has also entertained the notion that a second day of grace was granted in Hades to the antediluvians; but, as has been already observed, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." There would be less difficulty in expounding this passage if, instead of taking the Spirit of Christ to mean His disembodied spirit, separated from the body by death, it were to be taken as that quickening energy by which He raised Himself from the dead, and by which *He went and preached*—πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν. The Syriac version has *Et predicavit.* Cases might be found in Greek writers where the phrase, *He went and preached*, may be considered a pleonasm for simply, "He preached." In Ephesians ii. 15, 17, we read, ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο, *and came and preached peace*, etc. Now Christ did not go personally to the Gentiles to preach peace to them—He did so by His apostles; so by His Spirit in Noah He preached for 120 years to the antedi-

luvians, who were disobedient and perished for their unbelief. When Noah preached to them, they were men in the flesh; they were now spirits in prison when St. Peter wrote, kept unto the judgment of the Great Day. Or the prison may be construed as indicating the condition in which the souls of the antediluvians were bound upon the earth, during the time that God's long-suffering waited, just as the fallen angels are said by St. Jude to be in chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the Great Day, although now permitted to exercise their malignity upon the earth. There is a parallel passage in Isaiah xxiv. 21, 22, where the Jews are represented as being shut up as in a prison, and which may have had its fulfilment when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and afterwards when Titus Vespasian surrounded it, and shut in the inhabitants, previous to their final overthrow. What then will the passage in 1 Peter iii. 19, teach? It will show us that Christ, by His Spirit in Noah, preached for 120 years to the antediluvians, who were then as in prison, being bound by the chain of their sins. A proclamation of mercy was given them, but they took no heed to it. That Spirit in Noah enabled him to bear the reproaches and blasphemies of that wicked race, and steadfastly to stretch out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people. This same Spirit of Christ can enable you, the Christians of the dispersion, to suffer patiently the fiery trial through which you are now passing, "not accepting deliverance, that you may obtain a better resurrection." But why is reference made to the days of Noah at all, as the Apostle is speaking of patient endurance and suffering for righteousness' sake? Because not only was Noah a perfect example in this respect, but the ark in which he was safely kept was a symbol of the blessings which Christians derive from being admitted into the ark of Christ's Church, and sealed with the baptismal seal of the New Covenant. And as the ark was a type of

Christ's Church, the admission to which is by baptism, so the flood, which destroyed the ungodly, was a like type of that everlasting destruction with which the wicked in this dispensation shall be punished, "from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. i. 9).

Eight persons were saved by water; for that which brought safety to them, brought destruction to the world of the ungodly. This water, which was thus the medium of safety to Noah and his family, was a figure of the waters of baptism, which is now putting us into a state of salvation. It was not the flood that preserved Noah, but it was the means of sustaining the ark; it transferred him from the old world to the new, and was therefore to Noah a kind of baptism, just as the Red Sea was to the children of Israel. "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us"—not of itself, but the spiritual thing conjoined with it, repentance and faith, of which it is the sign and the seal. Christ has therefore descended into the region of the dead, and has come forth the conqueror of its tyrant king; and He holds in His hands alike the keys of the grave and the unseen world, admitting and excluding as He pleases, until He shall return to unlock their prison doors for ever, and swallow up death in victory.

Ver. 19. *Γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες, καὶ ἃ εἰσι, καὶ ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter.* The *ἃ εἰσι* is interpreted by some as the same as *ἃ εἶδες*, and the former is taken as an explanation of the things St. John had seen—or "what they are"; and this view is supported by the fact that an explanation is at once given of the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden candlesticks.

In this respect St. John was specially privileged, as the

Apostles were not instructed, as a rule, to throw light upon what had been communicated to them, by offering an explanation. But the things St. John saw included more than the ἃ εἰσι, for the vision we have just now described, and endeavoured to elucidate, and the whole indeed of chapter i., are quite distinct from the ἃ εἰσι, which occupies the addresses to the Seven Churches in chapters ii. iii. "Write: for what thou sawest is proof that I, the first and the last, and the Living One, am able to fulfil what I promise, and that My words shall stand to a thousand generations—that heaven and earth may pass away but My words shall not pass away. Write, therefore, because I have the keys of death and Hades, and I know the Church's trials, and will bring her safely through them all. Write, for her encouragement, for her comfort, for her support." "The things that are," relate to the condition of the Churches of Asia Minor, to which he was instructed to give both warning and consolation. "The things that shall be hereafter," refer to the things recorded from Revelation iv. to the end, and which are a symbolical representation of the Church's future history. The words, μετὰ ταῦτα, *after these things*, are indefinite. They do not fix the period embraced by the Apocalypse; but we know, from the concluding portions of the book, that, as the Bible begins with Paradise lost, it ends with Paradise regained; and the grand terminus of prophecy is, therefore, reached, when, after all the events connected with the Second Advent, the first resurrection, the binding of Satan, the millennial reign of Christ with His risen saints, the General Judgment follows, and the new heaven and new earth, fitted for the reception of the redeemed, are occupied by their pure and spotless inhabitants, whose unending and unabated enjoyment and happiness shall be the service of their God. Heaven shall be the Great Temple of the Universe, lighted up by the presence of God Himself. His servants shall serve Him; they shall see

His face; enjoy, what they ardently longed for here, the rapture of the Beatific Vision; and His name shall be in their foreheads; and they shall reign for ever and ever. Thus the μετὰ ταῦτα reaches to the final consummation of all things; and the outlines of the Church's history were intended to be defined with accuracy and precision, from the period in which the Apocalyptic vision was revealed until the end, when the Church militant here on earth would be exchanged for the Church triumphant in heaven.

Ver. 20. τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων, ὧν εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου, καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσᾶς. Οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσι· καὶ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσί, *the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.* A mystery is a revelation unexplained. It is not something that cannot be discovered by natural reason, and was never intended to be so discovered; but, in Scripture, it signifies something of which we have a Divine revelation, but as to the meaning of which we are ignorant. The word is derived from the Greek μύω, *to shut*, or, as others suppose, from the Hebrew מִסְתָּר (*mistar*) *a hiding-place*, and therefore conveys to us the idea of something concealed. The disciples of our Lord knew the meaning of the parables (μυστήρια), which meaning was concealed from the scribes and Pharisees. What was therefore a mystery to the one class was a revelation to the other. In the mystery of the seven stars, which St. John saw here in the right hand of Christ, the Apostle did not know what the symbol was meant to convey. But Christ now proceeds to reveal it. The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches. Those stars were beautiful emblems of the representatives of the several Churches. They were set in the

firmament of the Church catholic, and furnished with gifts and grace for its guidance and support; while these qualifications were borrowed from the great central luminary, Christ, the Sun of righteousness, and the stars themselves kept closely in His right hand. There is a systematic arrangement here, a regular order observed. Just as we see in the planetary system all its movements in harmonious order, so that we infer that the laws by which the stars are regulated are the design of an intelligent lawgiver; so here the seven stars which St. John saw in Christ's right hand, are arranged in their respective places, and directed and governed by Him who is the Church's Head. Nothing is left to chance; there is no self-constituted ministry; the Church is not less the object of Christ's care and supervision than the worlds which He has made. He is her Lawgiver; He is her King; and those who are placed in positions of responsibility and trust for the edification of the body of Christ are His appointment.

οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι, κ.τ.λ. The explanation of the mystery here given has been the occasion of considerable controversy. Who are meant by the *Angels* of the Seven Churches is not so clear as at first sight may appear. According to the peculiar views on Church government of interpreters, the word, ἄγγελοι, has received meanings which are very far from the mind of the Holy Spirit, indeed, quite adverse to the whole tenor of Scripture. The best mode of arriving at the true meaning of Scripture is by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and seeing that the result of our investigations is not at variance with the general teaching of the Word of God. It has been thought that the word, ἄγγελοι, is to be interpreted literally as heavenly angels, and that the guardian angels of the Churches are here respectively addressed; and they who take this view assert that, as there are guardian angels over individuals, there is no reason why there should not be such over Churches. But whether

this be so or not, it is very clear that there are objections which are so strong against this view as to render it quite untenable.

(1) The Apostle is instructed to *write* to the *Angel* of each Church; now we cannot conceive of any such communication between angels and men.

(2) The Angel is addressed in some cases as *blameworthy* which could not be predicable of holy angels.

(3) If the reading in the address to the Angel of the Church of Thyatira, ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζαβήλ, be correct, it would imply that the presiding angel had a wife, whereas amongst heavenly angels "they neither marry nor are given in marriage." And, although the application of the word to heavenly beings is so grotesquely absurd, this interpretation was adopted by Origen and Jerome. Another mode of interpretation is to regard these Angels, not as presiding over the Churches, but as messengers sent by the Churches to St. John, and commissioned by them to bring back messages to the respective Churches. This will not stand for an instant, for there is no evidence whatsoever that the Churches sent any such messengers to the Apostle, nor would it have been practicable if the Churches had so intended. Besides, the message was not sent *by* messengers, δι' ἀγγέλων, but to them, "Unto the Angel of the Church of Ephesus, write," etc.

The Angels therefore here addressed can neither be heavenly beings, nor messengers sent *from* the Churches; and it only remains for us to regard them as Presidents, Superintendents, or Bishops, exercising authority and jurisdiction over the respective Churches. We cannot suppose that Churches, which in St. Paul's time, thirty years before, had been in the most flourishing condition—for example, Ephesus, where St. Paul had laboured for three years, and from which a considerable number of presbyters came to take leave of him at Miletus—could have now dwindled

down to so low a condition as to consist of one congregation in each of the cities, with one presiding presbyter. On the contrary, we have reason to believe that the Gospel rapidly progressed during the intervening period, and that the Churches were greatly enlarged; and we may therefore conclude that there were in cities like Ephesus and Smyrna, not merely one Church ministered unto by one presbyter, but many Churches placed under one president, who is called by the name "Angel." This name is not, certainly, applied elsewhere in the New Testament to a bishop, nor is it applied to a presbyter; but it is in perfect accord with the symbolical character of the book in which it occurs, and is admirably adapted to express the nature of the office, and the responsibilities of those to whom the spiritual charge of the several Churches was committed.

On this point Archbishop Trench well remarks: "Those to whom this title is ascribed are herein presented to the Church as clothed with a peculiar dignity, and are herein themselves reminded that they stand before One whose ministries of grace and love they should be swift to fulfil on earth, even as those whose names they bear are swift to fulfil them in heaven."

We have distinct proof that, in Ephesus, there were several ordained presbyters and deacons. Compare, for example, Acts xx. with St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy (1 Tim. iii. 12; v. 7). In what position was Timothy at Ephesus? He was to superintend the doctrinal teaching of the clergy (1 Tim. i. 3, 4; iv. 6), and to examine the character and qualifications of candidates for the orders of presbyter and deacon (1 Tim. iii. 1–8, 14). This authority had been given to him by the laying on of St. Paul's hands (2 Tim. i. 6), together with the laying on of the hands of the presbyters (1 Tim. iv. 14).

If the word "Angel," then, applies to the highest order in the Christian Church, as we believe it does, clearly, in the

case of the Church of Ephesus at least, Timothy may be regarded as overseer of the Churches at that place, of which Churches, and indeed the whole of Asia Minor, St. John had been the Metropolitan. So also, in the case of Smyrna and other Churches, the term, "Angel," equally applies. In the only letter which is extant of Polycarp, there is evidence that he was Bishop of Smyrna. His words are: "Polycarp, and the Presbyters who are with him, to the Church of God which sojourneth in Philippi, mercy to you, and peace from God Omnipotent, and Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, be multiplied;" and in Sec. 5, he exhorts the people to be "subject to the presbyters and deacons as unto God and Christ."[1]

In the letters of Ignatius, the disciple of St. John, Polycarp is called Bishop of Smyrna in the sense in which we now use the title; and Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, towards the end of the second century, calls himself Bishop of Ephesus, and says he was the eighth holder of that office, having been preceded by seven.

That these Angels were bishops, we have the testimony of St. Augustine: "Angeli non debent hic intelligi, nisi Episcopi, aut Præpositi Ecclesiarum."

These "Angels" being addressed directly by Christ is a proof that He gave His sanction and approval to that form of Church government which then existed in Asia Minor; and moreover, while He censures them for some delinquencies, He never attaches blame to them for occupying the positions they held as bishops, which, as Wordsworth well observes, He would have done if it had been contrary to His will.

Although the word ἄγγελος is not used in reference to earthly beings in the New Testament, except here and in Luke vii. 27, where it is applied by our Lord to John the Baptist, yet it is the word used in the Old Testament (Hag. i 13), where Haggai is called *the Lord's Angel*, and in Malachi

[1] Polyc., *Ep. ad Phil.*, i. 5.

ii. 7, it is the word by which the Jewish priests are described: *For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, for he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts:* and there is no reason why a name which was applied to the prophets and priests under the Old Law should not more properly belong to those who presided over the Asiatic Churches in the Christian dispensation.

καὶ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ, κ.τ.λ, *and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.* The seven lamp-stands, as it should be more properly rendered, are seven Churches, *i.e.* they represent seven Churches, they are symbols of them, and are descriptive of their character. Seven was the number of perfection. This idea was taken from the fact of the work of creation being ended on the seventh day. The completeness symbolized by this number is that of rest after labour. This number occurs in the Revelation more frequently than any other, and its use is to designate rest after toil. Here the seven Candlesticks denote the seven Churches, not all the Churches of Asia Minor, for there were many others, but it gives us the idea of perfection, and applies to the Church universal. There are seven Seals. These symbolize the sufferings of the Church in the world, all terminating in the rest of heaven. There are seven Trumpets. These announce the judgment of God on the enemies of His Church during this dispensation, and until our Lord shall come. There are seven Vials. These pour out God's wrath upon mystic Babylon. There are various other places where the same number occurs. Why is it so frequently adopted? Because it is the sign of God's covenant relationship to His people, which runs like a silver thread through the whole of Old Testament Scripture.

The seven Candlesticks represent the universal Church. In their sevenfold unity, they are types of the Catholic Church of every country and age. When compared to seven golden Candlesticks, we have an image of her beauty and excellency. From Christ, her living Head, all her light

proceeds. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men; and by her doctrine and holy conversation, she affords light to them that sit in darkness. She waits outside the veil, and is designed to exhibit the Saviour to the world. How high her privilege to be the light-bearer of Him who is the Light of the world! In proportion as Christ, the true Light, is upheld, will her usefulness and glory appear. Whenever she fails in this respect, she loses her claim as the pillar and ground of the truth. Of some Churches it may be said, "They have taken away the Lord, and we know not where they have laid Him." There is the empty form, but the substance is gone. The candlestick is there, but the light has ceased to burn. It was thought by the ancients that if ever the fires which burned on the altar of Vesta became extinct, they could not be rekindled unless by being brought in contact with the sun; and it is no less true that if the Church of God is to "shine forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun," it must only be as she draws her light from Christ as her central Sun. It is His gift to diffuse spiritual knowledge, and life, and joy among His people; and, by His presence, to drive away the dark shadows of ignorance, superstition and sin. In His light alone the Church can see light. The false glare of the world is thereby dissipated, and life appears in its naked reality and its true proportions. We see our place in God's universe, and our destiny beyond the grave; and we are taught to regard Christ as "all our salvation and all our desire." The lampstands of ordinances and ceremonies may be there, but, until He comes, there can be no light in the soul. None need remain in darkness, for the true Light now shineth, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel." With gratitude and love may we join the Apostle of the Gentiles, and say,—"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!"

THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES.

CHAPS. ii. iii.

THE MESSAGES TO THE CHURCHES.

BEFORE considering the Message addressed to each Church separately, there are a few things which apply indiscriminately to all the Churches, and which show that in this respect there is a perfect unity of design and symmetry of arrangement in all these Messages.

There is a precision and purpose pervading these Messages which, while furnishing evidence that they all came from the same Divine source, also indicate that each individual Church was thoroughly sifted and examined by the "Searcher of hearts," and that the Message sent was appropriately suited to the condition and circumstance of that Church.

1. Each of the Churches is addressed through the President or Bishop. In this mode of communication there is implied not only a recognition of the position held by each "Angel," but also responsibility to God for the manner in which the solemn trust committed to that "Angel" was discharged.

2. The message is in each case prefaced by an allusion to some attribute of Christ, which bears directly upon the state of the Church addressed.

(1) To Ephesus: the Speaker introduces Himself as He who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

(2) To Smyrna: The First and the Last, who was dead and is alive.

(3) To Pergamum: He that hath the sharp sword with two edges.

(4) To Thyatira: The Son of God, who hath His eyes as a flame of fire.

(5) To Sardis: He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

(6) To Philadelphia: He that is holy and true, and who hath the key of David.

And,—

(7) To Laodicea: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness.

In closely examining the respective messages, it will be found that the attributes of Christ above alluded to have an appropriate application to the condition of each Church.

3. To each of the Churches Christ says, "I know thy works." He expresses His Divine Omniscience. There was nothing hidden from Him. He needed not that any one should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. His Divine Omniscience was a proof of His Godhead, and also showed that He who was walking in the midst of the seven golden Candlesticks was neither uninterested in their condition, nor an idle spectator of their requirements: but that when He saw neglect or blameworthiness, He would censure; and when faith, love, and obedience were observable, He would praise. "I know thy works." He knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning, and yet we find in Mark xiii. 32, speaking of the day of His Second Advent, Christ says, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven; neither the Son, but the Father." This does not imply ignorance; but the Son, who is the only Messenger of Divine revelation to man, does not know it so as *to reveal* it; it is no part of His prophetical office to do so. Aug., *de Trin.*, xii. 3, "Non ita sciebat ut tunc discipulis indicaret!" Christ claims that absolute knowledge of the secret hearts of men which left the conviction on the minds of His disciples—"We are sure that Thou knowest all things,"—nor could it be otherwise, for "in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

4. Each of the messages has an injunction and a promise annexed to it; the injunction, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches," clearly indicating that the message was of such great importance as to demand attention; and that, while it was addressed to each individual Church, it applied equally to all Churches. The promise varies as to the subject-matter in each case, but in all, the thing promised will only be conferred on him who overcomes. In each address the Church of God is viewed as a Witness for Him in the world, and the members of the Church are considered as warring a good warfare. The Christian life is a conflict. There are enemies to be met, difficulties to be overcome, self-denial to be exercised, trials to be endured, and those who will have the name of their Master written hereafter on their foreheads, must be prepared now to bear the cross, "confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil."

5. There are two of these Churches—Smyrna and Philadelphia—which receive approval and praise from Christ. There is nothing in doctrine, discipline, or manner of life, in respect of them, worthy of censure. Indeed, in regard to all the Churches, Christ is more willing to praise than to blame; and even when He has censured, where censure was necessarily required, He returns to praise, showing us that He has more pleasure in expressing approbation than in finding fault. In this respect do we not perceive the same loving and gracious Spirit which once said to the sinner, "Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more"?

Two of the Churches are censured—Sardis and Laodicea—the one for having a high profession and yet being in reality dead; the other for worldliness and lukewarmness; and yet the loving and merciful Saviour is careful to exempt the

few faithful ones wherever He finds them. "But thou hast a few names in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments." And while Laodicea is in the deep sleep of spiritual indifference, and must be roused from it by strong, and if need be, afflictive measures, He points out to her members that it is in love to their souls that this is done. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent." He willeth not the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn to Him and live. The three remaining Churches, Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, are alike praised and blamed. Their condition is such that, while there is much to approve, there is also much to condemn. Ephesus had left her primitive standard, and her spirituality had declined, yet she had exercised patient endurance, and borne the reproach of Christ when men brought in false doctrine, and had protested against it.

Ephesus was in some respects superior to Pergamum, for while the former hated the false teachers and cast them out, the latter retained them within her communion. Pergamum receives credit for faithfulness in time of severe persecution; but she is called upon to repent for not showing a greater regard for preserving purity of doctrine. As to Thyatira, heresies had grown up there, and had been encouraged by *τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζαβήλ*; and fearful punishment is threatened; but Thyatira has many things which Christ takes occasion to commend, viz. works, charity, service, faith, patience, and her last works more than the first. Thus, on reviewing the condition of all these Churches, we find the Church Universal represented, and at once a beacon and a bulwark furnished for guidance and defence unto all Churches throughout the world till the end of time.

I.

THE MESSAGE TO EPHESUS.

1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν·

2 Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου, καὶ τὸν κόπον σου, καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι κακούς· καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσί· καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς·

3 Καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις, καὶ ἐβάστασας, διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἐκοπίασας.

4 Ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ, ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκας.

5 Μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας, καὶ μετανόησον, καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποίησον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ, καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς.

6 Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν, ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ.

7 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις· Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὅ ἐστιν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ παραδείσου τοῦ Θεοῦ μου.

1 Unto the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy toil, and patience, and that thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast patience, and didst bear for My name's sake, and hast not grown weary.

4 Nevertheless I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I come to thee quickly, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of my God.

I.

MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS.

CHAP. ii. 1–7.

CHAP. II. Ver. i. *Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· unto the angel of the church in Ephesus write.* Ephesus was the chief city of Ionia, and the capital of Proconsular Asia. It was called by Pliny, "the ornament of Asia." As Corinth was styled, "Achaiæ caput," and by Cicero, "totius Græciæ lumen," Ephesus was called, "Asiæ lumen." Here the Roman proconsul had his residence; here was the seat of government for the whole province; and here was the great centre where men of wealth and learning met. This city was renowned for trade and commerce, and was in Roman times the great emporium of the East. Although it was a purely heathen city, still many Jews had found their way there both for the sake of commerce, and in order to avoid the persecution to which they were subject elsewhere. But what rendered Ephesus famous was its great temple to the goddess Diana, which stood on a commanding elevation between the harbour and the city, and had been raised at the expense of all Asia, and occupied more than two hundred years in its erection. This temple was one of the wonders of the world, and attracted a vast concourse of strangers; so that Ephesus may be considered the very centre of heathenism, and the throne of idolatry in the Apostolic age. Pilgrims came from afar to worship before the image of the great Artemis, and to carry away the silver shrines (which were small models of

the heathen goddess) to their own lands, as not only souvenirs of their visit, but as safeguards, as they supposed, against all evil influences.

The Ephesian Artemis was a huge ill-proportioned representation of the prolific powers of Nature, and in hideous deformity was more like a Hindoo idol than the graceful sculpture of Greece and Rome. Jerome contrasts the huntress Diana with her bow and quiver,—"quæ arcum tenet, atque succincta est,"—with the Diana of the Ephesians, whom he calls, "*illam multimammiam* quam Græci πολύμαστον vocant." The votaries of this disgusting idol believed that it fell down from Jupiter, the Father of the heathen gods; and models of it were set up for worship in many other heathen cities.

Ephesus was no less remarkable for its idolatrous worship than for its talismans, or books of curious arts, as they are called in Acts xix. 19. It was the resort of diviners, sorcerers, and magicians, and the magical figures and symbols which they used were called Ἐφέσια γράμματα; and these books of curious arts were a source of immense gain to those who practised the occult sciences.

Jews, no less than Gentiles, were engaged in these magical arts, and for the sake of gain and popularity they fell into the practices of the heathen, instead of openly testifying against them. We read of the seven sons of one Sceva who were exorcists, and of Alexander, Acts xix. 33, who may be identified with Alexander the coppersmith, mentioned by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Bishop of Ephesus (2 Tim. iv. 14), and who no doubt was connected with Demetrius and his craftsmen who made silver shrines for Diana. Here then was a field for Apostolic labour which, if once cultivated, would produce a plentiful harvest. If this stronghold of the Prince of Darkness was won for Christ, all Asia would ultimately be reduced into subjection to the power of the Cross.

The planting of a Church in Ephesus was the work of St. Paul. We do not undervalue the labours of Apollos, nor do we forget that there were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Jews from Pontus and Asia, who might have brought back to their own country the tidings of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and the conversion of vast numbers of Jews to the Christian faith, although on reading Acts xix. 1, one would suppose that those disciples of the Baptist whom St. Paul met had never heard of a Holy Ghost. This, however, is not what the passage conveys. Rather the disciples of the Baptist had not heard of the fulfilment of the promise made by their master, that Christ would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. We may suppose that these disciples of the Baptist exercised according to their light the functions of their master in some respects, in calling upon their kinsmen to repent. With what effect we are not told, nor do we know of any missionary effort of importance having been made at Ephesus until the arrival of St. Paul there, as recorded in Acts xix. After going down to Antioch, he went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples, after which he came to Ephesus.

He first enters the synagogue and preaches to his countrymen that Jesus was the Christ. This he did for three months, yet not without opposition, for the Jews were incensed against him because he preached salvation without obedience to the law of Moses. He could no longer continue in the synagogue, and was obliged to separate the disciples from the unbelieving Jews, and hold his public preaching in the school of one Tyrannus. He had done similarly when he was at Corinth (Acts xviii. 7). Who Tyrannus was we have no possibility of knowing—some think he was a converted teacher of rhetoric or philosophy, others that he was a physician, and that the *σχολὴ Τυράννου τινός* was a school of

medicine belonging to Tyrannus, who had become acquainted with St. Paul's friend and companion, "the beloved physician," through whose instrumentality the lecture room was obtained.[1]

For two years the school of Tyrannus was the centre of the Apostle's labours in Ephesus, so that here all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

The truth which he taught was attested by miracles: "insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body, handkerchiefs, or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out" (Acts xix. 12). Just as we find in Acts v. 15, where we read, "they brought forth the sick into the streets, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them;" so here they took away napkins or aprons used by St. Paul, to the sick who could not come to him; not that there was any virtue in these, but in the response of Christ to the touch of faith. He had promised that His disciples should do greater works than those which He had done, when His bodily presence had been withdrawn; and now in that city where magical arts, and sorcery, and witchcraft, were practised—where the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience was deceiving the people—God would show by his Apostle, through these weak instrumentalities, the power that He could put forth to destroy the works of the devil. As the touch of faith had healed the woman who had the issue of blood, and who said, "if I may but touch His garment I shall be made whole," so now power is exercised adapted to meet the faith of the Ephesians in those superstitious practices with which they were conversant, and convince them that the finger of God was present, just as in the time of Pharaoh, and that no resistance, whether in the

[1] Plumptre's *Ep. to Seven Churches*, p. 56.

human heart or in the outer world, can be made to His will. If the ordinary course of God's Providence will not effect His purpose, He has recourse to miracles—"His strange work." If a rent has occurred in nature's harmony—if sin has entered into God's creation and disturbed those beautiful laws which were first established—then miracle is necessary in order to counteract the consequences of sin, and reproduce that equilibrium which originally prevailed. Those who will not admit of miracle tell us that if God were to interfere with the laws of nature, the world would go to ruin. In reply, it may be said, if the world as it is were left to itself, it would go to ruin, and it only remains because God has from time to time interfered to restore its order and to readjust the balance which had been overthrown by sin. How effectually the power of Satan was overcome in the case of the Ephesians is shown by the fact that those who practised curious arts were so convinced of the power of Christianity through the Apostles, that they brought their books and burnt them in some open place, publicly before the people, and their value amounted to 50,000 pieces of silver. If the drachma of the Levant was that which was in circulation in Ephesus, the price of these books would be about £2,000. "So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed." In this open repudiation of idolatry and sorcery on the part of the Ephesians, we see how widespread were the effects of St. Paul's teaching, and how great a testimony is borne to the power of the Gospel, which was received with such a warmth and welcome, that, not only did they cheerfully cast in their lot with the followers of Christ, but took steps to prevent their ever afterwards having recourse to the soul-deceiving tenets they had once maintained.

We may look upon Ephesus as the Church above all others that enjoyed the Apostle's highest confidence, as here he remained longer than at any other place, instructing the

people in the principles and practices of the Gospel—indeed, from the Epistle he afterwards wrote to that Church, we may regard the Ephesians as more highly instructed in the truths of Christianity than any other Church, as there are revelations of sublime mysteries communicated to them, which other Churches could not have understood, unless they had undergone a thorough training in the doctrines of the Christian faith. This Epistle, which he wrote during his first imprisonment at Rome, contains no censure, nor does it allude to any declension of the Ephesians from their first love. When on his way to Jerusalem for the last time, the Apostle had sent for the Presbyters of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus; and although he had in that solemn charge he there delivered, warned them against the grievous wolves that, after his departing, should enter in among them, not sparing the flock, yet in the Epistle to the Church at Ephesus he makes no allusion to the fulfilment of that circumstance. On the contrary, he speaks of the Church in terms of the highest praise, and makes special allusion to the faith and love of the Ephesian Christians (Eph. i. 15). The men who should arise from themselves speaking perverse things, such as Hymenæus, Alexander, and the Nicolaitans (1 Tim. i. 20; Rev. ii. 6), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. i. 15), had not yet made their appearance. To such St. John alludes in his first General Epistle,—"They went out from us, because they were not of us." It is true that, in writing to Timothy, he does speak of a denial of the resurrection on the part of some, and a barren Antinomianism rejoicing in a pretended illumination, yet not careful to maintain good works—a hypocritical profession while the life was inconsistent and godless. The germs of Gnosticism were then floating in the religious atmosphere; but they had not developed into that matured state which we find so strongly condemned by Him "who holds the stars in His right hand, and walks in the midst of

the seven golden candlesticks." There were "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, having a form of godliness but denying its power." There were those who "crept into houses and led captive silly women laden with sins, led away by divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Timothy, who had been with St. Paul when he gave his charge to the Presbyters of Ephesus, had been afterwards appointed as Bishop of the Church in that place. For thirteen years he had been St. Paul's faithful companion, and he had had the benefit of the Apostle's experience and administration; and as St. Paul was desirous, before being called away, of having the Church of Ephesus placed under a Bishop whose faithfulness, zeal, and devotedness were indisputable, Timothy was chosen to discharge the duties of his office there. He was a young man when appointed to this post (1 Tim. iv. 12). Servius Tullius, in classifying the Roman people, divided their age into three periods: *childhood* he limited to the age of seventeen; *youth* from that to forty-six; and *old age* from forty-six to the end of life. Now supposing Timothy to have been eighteen years old when he became St. Paul's assistant, A.D. 50, he would not be more than thirty-two in A.D. 64, when two years after the Apostle's release from imprisonment, he wrote his Epistle to Timothy. If then Timothy's life was spared until extreme old age, we may regard him as the Angel of the Church at Ephesus when the message was sent to that Church through St. John. In that case, he and St. John were both residing in Ephesus at the same time; but this circumstance would present no difficulty, for St. John, as the last surviving Apostle, would have jurisdiction over all the Asiatic Churches. Eusebius makes Timothy first Bishop of Ephesus, and Nicephorus states that he was clubbed to death at Diana's feast for having denounced its licentiousness.[1] There is much

[1] Euseb., *Eccl. History*, iii. 43.

in the message to the Church at Ephesus which exactly corresponds with the character of Timothy; and his natural temperament was such as likely to cause him "to leave his first love." The solemn injunction of St. Paul (2 Tim. i. 13) would have a powerful application if viewed in the light of subsequent events; and if Timothy was the Angel of the Church at Ephesus when St. John wrote, there is conveyed the lesson alike to pastor and people, not to weary in well doing—and having put the hand to the plough, not to look back.

The records of history are obscure, and there is little known positively regarding the last days of the first Bishop of Ephesus. The martyrologies state, and it is also in accordance with the tradition of the Church at Ephesus, that he suffered death by stoning in that city.

But what is of most importance is whether Timothy was indeed the Chief Pastor of the Church at Ephesus when St. John wrote. If so, we may see that there had been good reasons for St. Paul's exhortations: "Take heed unto thyself and to the doctrine." "Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. i. 13). "Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. ii. 1). "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. iv. 5). It has been thought that the work, the labour, and endurance, spoken of in the message to the Church at Ephesus, were the points to which Timothy's attention is directed in St. Paul's second Epistle, and in which he is exhorted to abound more and more. From this it is inferred that an earlier date must be fixed for the messages to the seven Churches than has generally been supposed, in fact, that they must have been written during the lifetime of St. Paul, and not in the reign of Domitian. But in the time of St. Paul, we do not find any denial of Christ's humanity, at least we have no allusion to

it, nor is the sect of the Nicolaitans even mentioned. His writings are chiefly directed against Jews, Judaizing teachers, or false Christians; but in the writings of St. John, there were certain heresies then alluded to, such as those of the Cerinthians, Ebionites, and Nicolaitans, and which he took occasion to refute systematically; and whatever semblance "the work, the labour, and endurance," for which the Apostle gives credit to his beloved son in the faith (Timothy), may have to those good qualities for which the Church at Ephesus is praised by the Great Head of the Church in the message sent to it, the coincidence could hardly be considered as an argument in favour of an earlier date for the Revelation. Intolerance of evil, scrutiny of false apostles, yet an easy self-satisfied condition, wanting zeal, earnestness, and vitality —these are the marks of the Church at Ephesus when St. John wrote; and we cannot find such prevailing at the time when either St. Paul wrote his Epistle to that Church, or when he wrote his Pastoral Epistle to Timothy. Indeed, labour, work, and endurance, are what might be expected to be found in any Church; but what peculiarly is noticeable in the Ephesian Church when St. John wrote, was the Angel of the Church "having left his first love"—for it is of him specially predicable, because he was the representative, and had the souls of all the Christians at Ephesus committed to his care. Nor are we to suppose that the members of the Church at Ephesus had maintained their enthusiasm, when their spiritual master had become relaxed in his love. There is always a reciprocal feeling between pastor and people; and if the one gets careless or cold, so will the other. The living fire which glows in the heart of the preacher will make itself felt in the hearts of the people; and we are therefore warranted in believing that the departure from first love was not confined to the President or Bishop of that Church. We may gather from St. Paul's Pastoral Epistle to Timothy, that

there were certain conditions to be fulfilled, certain duties to be performed, and precepts to be observed, if he would maintain energy and enthusiasm. He calls upon him to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; to stir up the Grace of God, *ἀναζωπυρεῖν* (rekindle); to abide in the things which he had learned; to be instant in season, out of season; to be sober in all things, and do the work of an evangelist. What was "the first love" which the Angel of the Church of Ephesus had left? Was it love to God and Christ, or love for the souls of men? This will come before us more properly hereafter when the first portion of the message has been noticed. The Angel of the Church at Ephesus occupied the highest position amongst the chief pastors of the Asiatic Churches, and according to his eminent standing, his responsibilities were enhanced. A Church which one Apostle planted, and another watered, was undoubtedly a highly privileged one, and we would be prepared naturally to expect from it a noble testimony for Christ, and the diffusion of much spiritual enlightenment to the world. Whether it answered these expectations we may gather from the Message addressed to it.

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν, *These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.* Each Message opens with a description of Him who instructs St. John to write, and has some attribute of Christ which has a direct reference to, and bearing upon, the circumstances of the particular Church. The Message here sent comes from Him who *holds*—*ὁ κρατῶν*, not as in chap. i. 16, *ὁ ἔχων*, *He that hath*—the seven stars in His right hand. There cannot be a more comforting and assuring thought than to feel that those whom the Head of the Church appoints to the work of the sacred ministry He holds in His right hand. So long as

these stars reflect His light, He will be their Great Centre. He who marshals the hosts of heaven, calling them all by their names, will guide, protect, and uphold, those who, in His Church, are designed to be His messengers; yet, if they are unfaithful, if they hold not forth the Word of Life brightly and steadily before men, let them know that they shall forfeit all claim to be upheld by Him, and shall be rejected by Him as castaways.

ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ, κ.τ.λ., *He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.* As the high priest moved in the sanctuary backwards and forwards, so here Christ walks in the midst of His Church. He is unwearied in His active exertions on her behalf; He restrains her foes, He guards her against the assaults of the adversary; He corrects her abuses by chastisement if need be; and makes His pleasure to prosper in her hand. His eye is ever scrutinizing the motives and springs of the Church's life, and if He sees the lamps need fresh oil, He gives the needful supply, and if they require trimming, He withholds not His Hand in order that they may burn brighter. But if there are those who, like the foolish virgins, are sitting beside dim and expiring lamps, from sloth and indifference, while inexhaustible supplies of oil are within easy reach, His voice will be heard in condemnation—"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion."

When St. John saw the vision described in the previous chapter, Christ was in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; but now he beholds Him walking up and down in the midst of them. As Hanani, the seer, when reproving Asa for his league with Benhadad, said,—"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chron. xvi. 9), so the presence and power of Christ are still with His Church. "He is in the midst of her, and He will help her, and that right early." When we see human

stays and helps removed, we are apt to be discouraged; and when we find "the powers that be" not wishing to retain God in their knowledge, and divorcing religion from the State, we feel as if an insult were offered to High Heaven, and as if blight and barrenness would come upon the nation, for such open disregard of Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice; but, on the other hand, when we reflect that danger lies in the way of the Church's spiritual vitality, when the sunshine of imperial patronage beams too brightly; we must acquiesce in Divine Wisdom and be taught not to lean on the arm of flesh, but upon Him who ordereth all things according to the counsel of His own will. We want more of that faith which led the prophet to say when he saw the dark shadows of the captivity gathering around his nation —"Though the everlasting mountains be scattered, and though the perpetual hills do bow, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 6, 18).

Christ walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks either to contribute to their stability, or, if they have become useless light-bearers, to have them replaced by others more worthy. While He will not quench the smoking flax, but administer the needful means of fanning it into flame, He will not overlook the condition of the Church which by its self-sufficiency and self-righteousness has ceased to derive its life from the Sun of Righteousness—which has lost sight of the loadstar of heaven, and is groping its way by the dim guide-posts of earth. Have we not an illustration in our Lord's dealings with Jerusalem? It was the Church of His early affections, the home of His soul in the days of His flesh, His Father's House, where His Father's business was done by Him; and yet when it knew not the day of its visitation though dear to Him as the apple of His eye, or the signet on His right hand, He will cast it away as vile and worthless.

And Churches now which are unmindful of the mainten-

ance of spiritual life, and active energy in the cause of God when opportunities are presented to them of letting their light shine before men, shall equally fall under the rebuke of Him who walks still amid the seven golden candlesticks. He is the source of the light which all Churches should hold forth to the world. Just as the sun is the great centre and light-contributor to the planetary system, at once the source of its unity and the support of its glory, so is Christ to the Church. He has promised that wheresoever two or three are gathered together in His name, there He will be in the midst of them.[1]

"Ubi Christus est ibi ecclesia" is not less true now than it was when Lactantius wrote it. Without that presence the skeleton may be there, but the soul is gone. And if Christ is walking in the midst of His Church, it needs no prophet to predict her safety. The bush may burn, but it will never be consumed. The children of God, like those in the fiery furnace, may have to encounter the fiery trial, but they need fear no evil, for the Son of God shall be with them. The storms of affliction and the fierce tempests of bitter tribulation may beat in all their fury against the Ark of God, but amid the rifts of the dark clouds will His Heavenly Form be seen, as it was by the disciples, and His voice be heard above the waterfloods, "Be of good cheer: it is I, be not afraid."

"Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," is the Church's charter. Her Divine Head has gone to His seat above, yet He is still present. Need we fear for the future that His promise shall fail? Sooner may the harps of angels be unstrung, and the melodies of heaven's minstrelsy cease—sooner may the laws of Nature be reversed, and all things return again to primæval chaos, than one jot or tittle of that

[1] St. Jerome, speaking of the Church, says: "Ecclesia non parietibus consistet, sed in dogmatum veritate: Ecclesia ibi est, ubi fides vera est." Jerome, *in Psalm.* cxxxiii.

promise fail. If only the Church of God could realize this Divine Presence—if individual Christians could—what a power would be imparted! and with what increased energy and zeal should we go forth into the world to war a good warfare, if we could confidently say, "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge."

Ver. 2. *Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου, καὶ τὸν κόπον σου, καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι κακούς· καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶ, καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, I know thy works, and thy toil, and patience, and that thou canst not bear them which are evil, and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.* The words, "I know thy works," apply to all the Churches. This formula is the preface in each address to what the Searcher of hearts has to say of each Church, whether of praise or blame; and, therefore, although it is connected with labour, and patience, and intolerance of evil, on the part of the Angel of the Church at Ephesus, we must not regard the expression as here conveying any idea of their quality. Here they were good; in the case of the Church at Sardis, they were imperfect. What is expressed by this formula is the omniscience of Him who walketh in the midst of the seven golden Candlesticks.

The Church at Ephesus had been careful to maintain good works, and when St. Paul wrote to that Church, he took care to show the Ephesians that they were not to depend upon them for salvation, but in the work of Christ received by faith: not that good works are not pleasing and acceptable to God when they spring from a lively faith, for when the Holy Spirit works in us, and makes us His workmanship, by bestowing upon us the Divine nature, we must necessarily bring forth the fruits of righteousness. Each of us has a work to do for Christ. It is not sufficient to profess Christ, and rest in a

barren profession. When Solomon looked abroad on the world, he found all things full of labour; it is not less so in the Church of God. Each has talents from God, which He has given us as a trust, and to improve these is what He requires us to do; and for the manner in which we have used them, we must render an account. In His great house there are vessels of greater or less capacity, and all should be used in the service of the Master. The noblest encomium perhaps ever bestowed upon a follower of Christ was—"She hath done what she could!" Before entering on His service, we must count the cost. There is no use in making profession of loyalty and obedience, unless we are prepared to practically carry it out. "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest" was said by one who, when he heard from the Saviour's lips, "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head," abandoned his purpose; nor did the young ruler, who came running to Christ to ask Him what good thing he should do to inherit eternal life, when asked to sell all he had and give to the poor and follow Christ, show that he had any real earnestness to follow Him, because he went away sorrowful. Work was appointed in Eden before sin made labour toilsome and oppressive; and, it is said, that in heaven God's servants serve Him day and night in His temple. Works are the evidence of faith; and when our blessed Lord said to the Angel of the Church at Ephesus, "I know thy works," this was as much as to say, I have evidence of your earnest heartfelt desire to serve me, and I recognise your "work of faith and labour of love," which shall not be overlooked in the estimate I may form of your spiritual condition. It is added, *καὶ τὸν κόπον σου, and thy toil*, or *active unwearied energy*. The word, *κόπον*, is derived from *κόπτω*, to hew wood, and hence the idea of unwearied toil which it conveys. In 1 Thess. ii. 9, it is placed in connection with

μόχθον, rendered *travail*, or patience in bearing the load that is placed upon us. The words are distinct; for, while the one indicates active energy, the other denotes passive endurance. It would seem that the κόπος here refers to ministerial labour, and it is so employed in Rom. xvi. 12: "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord." If the labour alluded to in the Message to the Church of Ephesus refers to that of the Angel of the Church, we know that St. Paul had exhorted the Bishop of Ephesus to exercise himself in this labour, when he calls upon him to be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, to endure afflictions, and do the work of an Evangelist." This exhortation had not been in vain, if Timothy was the Angel of the Church when St. John wrote; or, if not, it would seem that his successor had laid the Apostle's words to heart, and in either case the exhortation had not been without producing fruit. It is what St. Paul has expressed when he says, "Be not weary in well doing." Do not run well for a time, and then stop; but by patient continuance in well doing, you shall succeed in accomplishing the purpose of your ministry, and put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

The Christian ministry and the Christian calling alike demand active unwearied energy. We can never rest satisfied with present attainments, but the goal of to-day must be taken as the starting point of to-morrow. "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect," should ever be the incentive to fresh exertion in running the heavenly race. St. Paul knew nothing of either sinless perfection, or positive assurance; but his desire was to lay hold upon that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. He had not got into that state which, in this age, some people flippantly allege they have attained, when they exclaim, "I am saved." The probation of the soul has ceased, the assurance of the future is enjoyed. All further aspirations, move-

ments, efforts, in the Divine life are superfluous. We, on the contrary, must still be engaged in the κόπος. Like the Apostle of the Gentiles, we must still be reaching forth to the things before, in earnest faith and unremitting assiduity, remembering the saying of St. Augustine—"*Non progredi est regredi.*" When we see the means of grace abandoned, the institutions and ordinances of Christ ignored and slighted, a pretended sinlessness claimed, proud presumption taking the place of humility, the mortifying the deeds of the body overlooked and neglected, and a settling down upon the lees, we are reminded of what is said in Rev. xviii. 7, "I sit a queen, and shall never see sorrow," instead of the humble self-denying Christian, adding to his faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness charity (2 Pet. i. 5–7).

Human life is a struggle, and in the battle, the weak succumb while the strong survive; but the Christian life in this respect is different: the weak as well as the strong, babes in Christ as well as devoted Christians—they who have faith as a grain of mustard seed, as well as those who have "like precious faith"—equally may reach the goal and gain the prize. In this warfare there must be—there need be—no cessation, because our aim is not to achieve a triumph, but to grow into a character—to become like Christ. Like the sunflower opening to the radiant sunbeams, and drooping in sadness when the sun is gone, so our highest, best, and purest aspiration should ever be to know Christ, to magnify Christ, and to feel that in His presence is life. Christian progress is possible only in Christ. Apart from Him, Christianity vanishes into vapour; virtue becomes a dream, and human life an enigma that can never be solved. Whether then, as ministers or people, whether as teachers or taught, we should never forget that whilst here, active unwearied energy is the

essential condition of Christian progress—"the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" —and that this κόπος must be put forth under Him who is the great Captain of our salvation, and who has said, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, *and thy patience.* Calm endurance under undeserved wrong—this is patience; and there was need of inculcating it in the case of the early Christians, as they had to endure a great fight of afflictions from their Jewish and heathen persecutors alike. At Ephesus, St. Paul himself had well nigh lost his life, in that tumult that was raised by the united efforts of Alexander the coppersmith and Demetrius the silversmith, the one a Jew, the other a Gentile; and we cannot forget that it was to the Bishop of Ephesus he said, "Yea, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." In imitation of our blessed Lord, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously; so should His followers act. The patience with which the early Christians bore the scoffs and ridicule, the wrongs and buffetings of their cruel enemies was a mark of their having drunk deeply, from their Divine Master, the pure and heavenly doctrines which He taught in His Sermon on the Mount, and which He inculcated by sublime example. Here patient endurance is combined with active exertion. The Angel of the Church at Ephesus is praised for these virtues, whether in the exercise of his pastoral office he had recourse to correction or forbearance. But we cannot separate the chief pastor from the people, for what is addressed to him applies equally to the Church over which he presides. Long tried patience, then, we may regard as a mark of the Church at Ephesus. It is sometimes difficult to exercise this virtue, but it is a duty enjoined by the Church's Head. "Blessed are ye when

men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely. Rejoice and be exceeding glad." Not in exemption from suffering, but, in patient endurance of it, were they to possess their souls. This is a secret that heathenism never knew. The heathen world gave men credit for possessing the heroic virtues of strength and military prowess, but passive endurance, patience, submission, meekness under undeserved wrongs, never entered into their minds. If these latter virtues ever came before them, they were looked upon as evidences of weakness and effeminacy. Christianity has ennobled those qualities which had been previously despised. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, faith—these are the fruits of her heavenly mission, and with what force have they turned the world upside down. If we would exercise patience, we must only do so by imitating our Lord and Master, who, from beneath His crown of thorns, blessed a scoffing world; and it is only by looking to Him, and the glories of the unseen world, which the eye of faith can alone detect, we shall be enabled to persevere. We can only endure by seeing Him who is invisible.

καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ, κ.τ.λ., *and that thou canst not bear them which are evil.* The Church has just been praised for patience, and now it is spoken of as not bearing them that are evil. It is one thing to suffer patiently undeserved wrongs for Christ's sake; it is quite another to be tolerant of evil: and we may bear and forbear with sinful men, while we hate their sin. Indeed, to be intolerant of evil is a Christian virtue.[1] We may be angry and sin not. We may use our strongest protestation against sin, while we have pity for, and love towards, the individual. The heathen sinned openly without compunction. They had no proper feeling as regards the nature

[1] One of the darkest features in the character of a bad man as described by the Psalmist is—"Neither doth he abhor anything that is evil;" and Bishop Butler has shown that *anger* itself may find its legitimate exercise in the service of God.

of sin; their consciences were hardened, and they felt no shame, no matter how flagrant the crime. St. Paul speaks of them as *being past feeling* (Eph. iv. 19). Here there can be no doubt the Church at Ephesus had exercised its discipline, whether in the way of excommunication, or in a milder form by raising its protest against those who while professing to be Christ's in works denied Him; and for this there is unqualified approval. It is a sign of decay, which will speedily end in death, when we find all self-respect gone, and such complete demoralization in a Christian community, as will bear the workers of iniquity in its midst, and draw no distinction between the man that leads a consistent life, and him who is a reproach. In the Church at Ephesus, it had been foretold by St. Paul that men should arise from among themselves speaking perverse things, and drawing the disciples after them. There are a Phygellus and a Hermogenes mentioned in 2 Tim. i. 15, and Hymenæus and Philetus in 2 Tim. ii. 17. Who they are that are referred to in the message to the Church at Ephesus we have no positive means of knowing. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that they were evil men, and that the Angel of the Church could not bear them, which indicates that they had been separated from the fellowship of the faithful. In the visible Church the evil are ever mingled with the good, and this will so continue to the end. The tares and the wheat grow up side by side until the harvest; so in the Church of Christ. At the same time notorious offenders are not only to be rebuked, but rejected, until they be reconciled by penitence, and restored to the unity of the Church. Here St. Augustine well observes: "Ab iniquis recedere non potes, quia mixta est palea tritico usque dum ventiletur. Necesse est ut si proficis inter iniquos vivas. Ab iniquis recedere non potes: ab iniquitate recede." Aug., *in Psa.* xcii. While in this world, we cannot altogether depart from evil men; but we must depart from their iniquity.

We are enjoined to bear one another's burdens, and we are to bear the weaknesses and infirmities of weak brethren (Gal. vi. 2); but it is quite another thing to bear the evil of false brethren. "By their fruits shall ye know them." We are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them; and, in doing so, we may save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

The early Christians had to bear much for the name of Christ. When brought before heathen magistrates, Pliny tells us they were commanded *Christo maledicere* (*Ep.* x. 27), and to maintain their patience under such circumstances required that strength which comes from Him who has said, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." And not only had they to bear reproaches from the heathen, but to endure the weaknesses of professing Christians. In this respect St. Paul, who was jealous of any interference with his spiritual liberty, was content to forego his privileges, and to have that liberty circumscribed for the sake of weak brethren (1 Cor. viii. 13). And even the Apostle of Love, who had thoroughly understood the power of that new commandment that Christ gave to His Church, however much he was prepared to exercise the charity that suffers long and is kind, that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. xiii. 4, 7), yet when heresy was making its inroads in the Church, through the influence of evil men, he gave the most emphatic direction to have such propagators of error excluded from the society of the faithful. "If any one come to you, and bringeth not this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, nor bid him God speed, for he that biddeth him God speed partaketh in his evil deeds" (2 John 10). These heretics who denied either Christ's humanity on the one side, or His Divinity on the other, were unsparingly censured by him. And practically the Apostle showed his detestation of such men as adulterating the faith, for we are told that he left the

bath where Cerinthus, the heretic, was, fearing lest it should fall because the heretic was there.[1] Of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, Irenæus records the story, that when addressed by Marcion the heretic, and asked by him, "Dost thou not know me?" he replied, "Yes, I know thee, the firstborn of Satan." The Church at Ephesus had then been so far faithful in discountenancing the abettors of evil whether in doctrine, or in practice, and for this it is commended.

καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας, κ.τ.λ., *and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.* It is difficult to know who these teachers were to whom reference is made in this clause. Our Lord had foretold the rise of false Christs, and false prophets, who would show great signs and wonders that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect (Matt. xxiv. 24). But it might be said that this was fulfilled previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the appearance of these false Christs was confined to Palestine; or if these false Christs have a future manifestation, we are to look for them previous to the Second Advent; and in either case they cannot have any connection with those spoken of as having had a place in the Church at Ephesus. There were "grievous wolves" alluded to by St. Paul in his address to the Presbyters of Ephesus, who should enter in, not sparing the flock, and, of these very Presbyters men were to arise "speaking perverse things, drawing away disciples after them." We may regard these false apostles as being of the same class of false teachers as St. John alludes to in 1 John iv. 1, and called by him there ψευδοπροφῆται. Among these were men who denied the proper humanity of Christ, such as the followers of Simon Magus and the Docetæ, who taught that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh, but that all He did was merely in appearance. There were others, such as Cerinthus, who considered Jesus as a mere man, and

[1] Iren., *c. Hær.*, iii. 3.

Christ an Æon, who came from what the Gnostics called the *Pleroma*, and chose for a time the person of Jesus, entering into Him in the form of a dove at the waters of Jordan, and forsaking Him when He was about to suffer, then ascending on high, and leaving the man Jesus to die the death of the Cross. In addition to these false teachers there were the Nicolaitans to whom we shall refer in verse 6, and the Ebionites, a sect of Judaizing Christians, who considered Mosaic rites and ceremonies as necessary to salvation, and taught that Jesus was a mere man, thus denying His Godhead. Against the teachings and practices of these heretics, St. John writes in his first Epistle, and especially in chapter iv., where he says, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, for many false prophets are gone out into the world." He speaks afterwards of them as Antichrists, seducers, liars, deceivers. And he alludes to one prominent trait in their teaching—the denial of Christ having come in the flesh. Our Lord had given the touchstone by which they were to be tried—"By their fruits ye shall know them." If they do not teach that Jesus Christ is God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever—that these natures are indissolubly united in that Divine Person, who is very God and very Man—then, no matter what their pretensions to Divine authority may be, whether they work miracles in confirmation of their doctrines, or appear as angels of light, they are to be rejected as possessing the spirit of Antichrist. By what means the Angel of the Church at Ephesus had tried these false apostles, we are not informed, but our Lord's test (Matt. vii. 16) was no doubt adopted, both as to their fruits of doctrine and manner of life. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," was the confession of the Apostle of the Circumcision, upon which confession our blessed Lord said, he should build His Church; and now St. John in his first Epistle reiterates this as the test whereby false teachers

were to be known from true. Not that this in itself would be sufficient, because there might be many who would confess that Christ was come in the flesh, who, in works, would deny Him. The works, however, would be evidence that the confession was insincere, and that the faith which prompted it was only such as the devils have, who believe and tremble.

These pretenders to the Apostolate do not seem to have had so much a leaning in the direction of Judaism as towards that of heathenism, as their practices are directly subversive, not merely of the ceremonial law, but of all true morality. And furthermore, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans spoken of in verse 6, is a clear proof that it is not anti-Judaizing teaching that is combated, as it was in the time of St. Paul, but another form of heresy that had developed itself in a later period; for although St. Paul had warned the Ephesians of the heresies which should arise, it required time for them to take root, and spring up, so as to render them sufficiently formed, in order to be grappled with. Their saying they were Apostles would give them no claim to that distinction, no more than a man saying he had faith would necessarily imply that he possessed it. In an Apostle strictly so called there were three special qualifications which entitled him to that designation: (1) Every Apostle must have been an eyewitness of Jesus Christ after His resurrection (1 Cor. ix. 1). (2) He must have had power to work miracles; and (3) He must have had the capability of communicating that power to others. We do not find that these so-called "Apostles" laid claim to such prerogatives as these. Their doctrines and practices were a sufficient test of their having been destitute of the least title to the name they assumed, and hence they were found liars. St. John says: "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." We may therefore suppose that the false doctrine taught by these propagators of error had reference to the same

subjects which St. John alludes to in his first Epistle, and which were held towards the end of the first century by the heads of those sects already mentioned.

Ver. 3. *καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις, καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐκ ἐκοπίασας, and hast patience, and didst bear for My name's sake, and hast not grown weary.* It would seem here as if there was a repetition of the praise given in the previous verse, but on closely examining the words, we find it different. In the previous verse, the patient endurance, the *κόπος*, was chiefly in having to bear the reproach of Christ and the false teaching and corrupt practices of the evil workers, at least for a time; for we find the praise is accorded because the Angel of the Church had been intolerant of evil. Now the commendation is given because he had endured patiently so long amid so much that was God-dishonouring and debasing. There were things which he had borne, and things he could not bear. He had borne the reproach of Christ—he had taken up his cross, and was not wearied by the load: but to bear the wicked, the profane, the propagators of pernicious errors, would have been to show a craven spirit, and to be unfaithful to his Master.

We are to bear one another's burdens, their infirmities, and weaknesses, and we are to help those who are suffering under a load too heavy for themselves to bear, by our sympathies, by our sharing in their sorrows, and by rendering our charitable assistance. Each one will have to bear his own *φορτίον*—the load laid upon his back. He cannot shift his personal sins upon another—for them he is held accountable. The Pharisees imposed heavy burdens upon the people, and they themselves would not touch them with one of their fingers. And there are some now who would like to shift the responsibility from themselves, and lay their

φορτίον at the door of their spiritual guides; but every one of us must give account of himself to God. But then there is the βάρος, the load, the heavy burden which would crush us to the earth if there was no one to share it with us. Our blessed Lord has taken the heavy load of our sins upon Himself, and He has given us His light burden; and all who are His, while they are not without law to Christ, must regard His service as perfect freedom. To bear cheerfully the cross for Christ's sake is the mark of every Christian. St. Paul counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

The Codex Sinaiticus inserts after καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις, the words καὶ θλίψεις πάσας, *and all tribulations*, but this reading is not found in any other ancient MS., and it must have found its way into the text by the carelessness of transcribers.

καὶ οὐκ ἐκοπίασας, *and hast not grown weary.* The verb, κοπιάω, does not mean merely to labour, because, if so, there would then be a direct contradiction between this verse and the preceding one. There the Angel of the Church is praised for his labour, and here if οὐκ ἐκοπίασας meant *didst not labour*, it would be directly opposed to what goes before. The word, κοπιάω, however means, like κόπος, toil, or weariness from exhausting labour; and the sense will be —Thou hast patience, and didst bear for My name sake, and didst not grow weary or faint. Bengel paraphrases it thus: "Novi laborem tuum; non tamen *laboras*." "Thou toilest, but dost not feel the toil; such is thy patience." The praise is here given because the Angel had not grown weary with labour. He did not become "weary in well doing." The burden and heat of the day he had borne, but he had not fainted, or become exhausted. Well doing is one thing: constancy in well doing is quite another. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that you should not obey

the truth?" We may not put our hand to the plough and look back. It is possible to begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh. The brightest morning is often obscured by clouds. Through inconstancy, how often have the fairest plants of Grace been blighted; how often have the golden apples which the world strews across the path of the racer for the immortal prize tempted him to stoop and gather them, and, in doing so, to lose the crown which seemed all but within his grasp. Constancy of action is what God demands of us: not profession for a time, and then indifference; but an enduring toil which, because of our patience, we do not feel to be toil—a persevering life-long service. What good is the vain abortive effort which begins to build, but is not able to finish? It is only he that endureth to the end that shall be saved (Matt. xxiv. 13). Everything we see above, and around us, is ever active in fulfilling the purpose of its being: and should we be less so in doing the work which God has given us to do? "Life is real, life is earnest." Whether in the ranks of evil, or good, the forces which are being exerted are real: and we are all leaving our footprints on the sands of time, whether we will it or not. "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones:" so said one who was a thorough judge of human nature; still the statement is hardly true, for good deeds will be held in everlasting remembrance. No pious effort, no holy thought, no aim for God and Christ, no high impulse in the path of duty, can ever perish.

In the commendation of the Church of Ephesus, all that was deserving of praise is first mentioned before the weak points are noticed, which shows how full of tenderness and kindness is Christ, more desirous to find out the excellencies of individuals and Churches, and to record, with loving approval, the humblest effort put forth in His name, rather

than to crush with condemnation the weak and erring disciple. Yet He will not be blind to the faults and failings of His servants; for, while not extreme to mark what is done amiss, He will come even to the Angel of the Church, and when there seems to be a spiritual stupor over him, He will gently awake him as He did His disciples in the garden —"What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" With what thankfulness should His gentle and timely warning be received, so that what has been permitted through indolence, or instability, to be well nigh forfeited, may, by repentance, be renewed and restored.

Ver. 4. Ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκας. *Nevertheless I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love.* This vitiates in a great degree all the foregoing good qualities which are enumerated—orthodoxy of faith, earnest zeal, patience in unremitting labour; for what were all these without charity? No better than "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Let love be absent, and there may be a habit of duty, but there will be a want of religious affection, which will make our services cold and insipid; the casket may be there, but the jewel which gave it value will be gone. What makes our service acceptable to God is not the act of duty in itself; it is the affection, the love, the motive which prompted it. The absence of religious emotion cannot be compensated for; and to him who thinks he can serve God without it, it may be said, "One thing thou lackest." Like a great machine without the motive power, or a ship without its compass—all the parts may be complete, but there is no aim, no purpose, no end in view. In the Authorized Version the word *somewhat* is supplied, as if the ground of the censure was only a trifle, whereas it is of vital importance. There is no word in the original corresponding to "*somewhat*." It is, "Notwithstanding I

have . . . against thee;" so that the word, "*this*," may be properly taken to fill up the omission.

What was the First love to which reference is here made, and from which the Angel of the Church at Ephesus had departed? The idea is that of a bride having given her warm affection in the days of her youth to the object of her choice, and as time passed by gradually declining in her fervour. So Jeremiah (ii. 2) was enjoined to cry in the ears of Jerusalem, "Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of His increase." Now the Angel, as the representative of the Church at Ephesus, is reminded of the early devotion of that Church to God. When St. Paul wrote his Epistle to it, he thanks God for their love to all the saints, and for having chosen them that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love. He prays that being rooted and grounded in love, they may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and, in the end of the Epistle, he prays that grace may be with them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We may, therefore, believe that the first love of the Church at Ephesus was strong, incomparably stronger than that of any other of the Churches founded by St. Paul. The earnestness which showed itself in consuming in the flames the books of curious arts was a proof of the warmth of the affections of the Christians in their early profession of the faith. They thus rendered it impossible to go back to heathenism; they deprived themselves of all available means of retreat, and gave themselves up to the living and true God and His Son Jesus Christ, as the object of their fresh and fervent love. Their motto would seem to have been, *nulla vestigia retrorsum.* Having named the name of Christ, they must for ever depart from iniquity. There is

something beautiful, and elevating, and ennobling in seeing one whose heart beats with first love to God, who gives up himself to Christ when, as in confirmation, he professes to be His faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end; and who, in first communion by faith lays hold upon that pierced Hand, and pledges himself to cling to it in life and in death. It is as if an angel shook his wings, for it is redolent of heaven. It is as if, with the three disciples, we had been on the mount of Transfiguration, and were so enchanted with the heavenly vision that we would never like to leave the spot. "It is good for us to be here." What is first love but the spontaneous glowing warmth of religious affection spending itself upon God as its chief good; and how deep these spiritual emotions were may be gathered from the description of the Church's state before its first early fervour abated. That description, which the previous verses of the chapter contain, one would think, ought to be worthy of imitation by Churches now, and, so far from indicating declension, disclosed a very high standard of religious attainment; but what of all that is pure, and lovely, and of good report, if the evidence of spiritual vitality is not apparent. That spiritual declension did not take place suddenly. It required time to show itself, and we see no marks of it when St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians, or when afterwards he wrote his Pastoral Epistle to Timothy. There were then no symptoms whatever of that decay of spiritual fervour designated "having left first love": and this is a strong presumption in favour of a later period for the Revelation than the reign of Nero, and would appositely apply to the period which tradition fixes as the time when St. John wrote, namely, the latter part of Domitian's reign.

What then may we regard as the causes for the Church at Ephesus thus declining? The conversion of her children was attended with no small amount of excitement; and what

was quickly accomplished in the beginning was likely to be, in some respects, superficial. The seed sown on the stony ground speedily sprang up, but not having sufficient depth of soil into which to strike its roots, it soon withered away. However, we can hardly say that the Church at Ephesus possessed little real depth, for, if that were so, its members would not have been praised for their patient endurance under circumstances of trial.

Rather, it is to be feared, the fascinations and attractions of social life in Ephesus had a considerable influence in effecting that decline which is here alluded to. Ephesus was the centre of refinement, and strangers congregated here from all parts of the world ; and may we not suppose that the sunshine of patronage and power effected what the rough winds of persecution could not? There were in Ephesus lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God ; and when the heart is occupied with the vanities and frivolities of the world, it gradually becomes insensible to the claims of God, and gets indurated through the deceitfulness of sin. The world has a depressing effect ; it corrodes the soul, and its breath so bedims the conscience that the mirror, instead of reflecting truth, ceases to act. In proportion as we look downward or upward, we are either earthly or heavenly in our aims : if we look downward, the spirit sinks, and character sinks too ; if we look upward, nature rises, and beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord. It is quite true that, as we make progress in the Divine life, the enthusiasm which may have marked our first steps will have become less apparent, because it has settled down into a fixed principle. We become rooted and grounded, and we can withstand the fierce assaults of our spiritual foes with more certain hope of success. The storm which uproots the tender plant only causes the oak of the

forest to strike its roots the more deeply into the soil. What is therefore lost in fervour is gained in force. There is greater calmness, because the stream has deepened in its channel, and rolls in greater majesty; but let us not suppose that this was the condition of the Church at Ephesus as described in the message—"Thou hast left thy first love." There is the possibility of "departing from grace given and falling into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives" (Art. XVI.). St. Paul said to the Galatian Church, "Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. v. 4). There is no such thing as indefectible grace. Indeed this censure of the Church at Ephesus clearly implies that that Church had fallen from a high state of spiritual fervour, and required the grace of repentance, in order to regain what had been lost. And is not such a state predicable of many of our Churches now? When we see less zeal for the truth, a wider latitude for religious views, greater charity for those who hold deadly error, first love is then languishing, and it is only a question of time how long it will exist.

Ver. 5. *Μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας, καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποίησον· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I come to thee quickly and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.* In our Lord's dealings with the Angel of the Church at Ephesus, He will not leave him in despair under a sense of his grievous backsliding. As He sent a special message on the morning of the Resurrection day to the disciple who had denied Him, lest he should be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (2 Cor. ii. 7), so He calls upon the Angel to repent. He has descended from a higher to a lower level, and when a

Christian teacher does so, he sins against light. In Ezekiel, the Jews are admonished, "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone." They could not by any possibility divest themselves of the knowledge of the true God which they possessed; nor can a Christian, without imperilling his soul, descend from a high state of gospel privilege to one which only regards him as a Christian in name. This fall is one which incurs judgment. It is a grieving of God's Spirit—it is treating, as of little value, the possession of the love of Christ; there is, therefore, a call to repentance.

Repentance is, like faith, a saving grace which comes from God. We cannot repent of ourselves. The heart will never turn itself to God by its own mere inclination. As well expect the Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard his spots; and yet there is a call addressed here to the Church to repentance. Repentance is an abiding principle, which we can never dispense with while here: for, not until God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes in heaven, shall we cease to mourn over our sins and shortcomings. It is the companion of the Christian's life, and may only be parted with when he has entered the gates of the New Jerusalem. Sinless perfection is a state which belongs not to this life: it may apply to that of an angel, but of man it is said, "In many things we offend all," even of them who are perfect. The will needs constant renewing. It is the rudder which steers the ship of the soul over life's ocean; and, just as it is influenced, it will act upon us either for good or evil, enabling us either to choose the ways of wisdom, or "the way which seemeth right unto ourselves," and which terminates in our ruin.

Repentance, though it may produce in us godly sorrow for sin, will not make amends for it. Our future obedience, if such we could render, would have no effect in cancelling past

disobedience and transgression. Repentance will not renew first love, or restore it. That holy fervour which characterized our early profession cannot be reproduced all at once, by our earnest desires. By waiting, watching, praying, it may be kept from losing its force ; but when once, like the morning cloud or early dew, it has passed away, it requires persevering effort to have it restored. The difficulty is so great that this verse places before us two important helps which we are to have recourse to, in order to rouse the dormant spirit, and to quicken the cold heart—(1) Memory of what we once were, and of what we lost,—those peaceful hours we once enjoyed, when, like Adam and Eve, who walked with God in Paradise, before sin had darkened their minds, we felt one day in the courts of the Lord better than a thousand, and never wearied in rendering to Him the willing service and sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name (Heb. xiii. 15). And (2), Doing the first works, which, although "first love" has ceased, may still be within the compass of our exertion. Memory will bring vividly back the joys of former time. It will recall not only our joys, but our sorrows too. It has a wonderful power of bringing back again past associations, whether of pleasure or of pain. What has once been the object of memory can never be lost. The ship may sink in ocean's depths, but, years after, it may be, the wreckage will be found strewed on many a distant shore. So with memory.

There are events and circumstances which we may lose sight of for a time, and they may appear to have sunk hopelessly into oblivion ; but let some mental excitement occur, and they will stand in prominent review before us. Call then to mind the former days when you tasted of the heavenly gift, and when the beams of heaven's mercy were shining upon you. Think what it was to see the fulness of Christ's atonement, and to have shared in the benefits of His

sacrifice, and to have been made partaker of the Holy Ghost, and to have felt the rapture of communion with God when, like Moses as he descended from the mount, whose face did shine, you beheld as in a mirror the glory of the Lord and were changed into the Divine image. Will the remembrance of such happy moments not bring with it a salutary discipline? Perhaps the bitterest ingredient in the cup of the rich man was in the words—"Son, remember!" but memory then could produce no remedial effect. The harvest was past, the summer ended, and he was unsaved. Not so with the Angel of the Church at Ephesus. The experience, however painful, of past neglect, would tend to rouse the conscience, and stimulate to determined purpose after new obedience. The peace and joy, the hopes and aspirations of other days, the heavenly manna which fell each morning round the tent, and the river of the water of life which on every side abounded, refreshing the soul, and filling the heart with gladness, were now things of the past; but they had notwithstanding, in memory's exercise, a present value and force. They spoke of oases in the desert, of gardens enclosed by grace from the world's wilderness; and that they had been once enjoyed was more than a peradventure—it was a presumption—that they might once again be attained. "Remember from whence thou art fallen." Think humbly, reverently, prayerfully on these things, and you may yet hear those gracious words of consolation and encouragement from Him whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways—"I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him and observed him. I am like a green fir-tree. From Me is thy fruit found" (Hosea xiv. 4, 8).

The feeling will gradually come—first it may be remorse, then bitter sorrow, like that of the prodigal in his exile from

his father's home; but, when we have reached the lowest depths, we shall begin to ascend, and the memory of the fall will be the harbinger to guide our feet into the way of peace.

But we are also to have recourse to the other means of repentance—"*To do the first works.*"

Emotion and action are reciprocal. When love has been lost, we are not to try to bring it back by letting the soul react upon itself. This would be fruitless; but we are to do the works we were accustomed to do in the days of our fervent attachment to our Risen Lord. As works are the result of heartfelt love—faith working by love—and love proceeding from Him who first loved us; so when love becomes cold, "doing the first works" will bring back first love.

The Church of Ephesus had already been praised for its works. Let these then be engaged in, and the warm feeling will return, and the heart will no longer continue in its estrangement, nor the will in its perverseness; but, like the dove returning to the ark, the wayward spirit shall seek repose under the overshadowing wings of Him upon whom it shall never cease to bestow its gratitude, or to lavish its wealth of love.

εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔρχομαί, κ.τ.λ., *or else I come to thee quickly, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.* In the Revised Version the word ταχὺ is omitted, yet without good reason, for although it is not found in the Alexandrine and the Codex Ephraem Syri, it does occur in the Vatican MS., which possesses equal authority with those mentioned. Archbishop Trench thinks it has found its way into the text here from ver. 16, and has considered it of no authority. Christ's coming in regard to the other Churches is spoken of as "quickly," and therefore we may believe that the analogy holds good in reference to this. The coming here alluded to is quite distinct from His Personal coming. It is in the

exercise of His Providential administration of the affairs of the Churches that His coming is here spoken of. He came to destroy Jerusalem, and to punish the impenitent Jews for their rejection of the gospel; and now the professing Christian Church which will not be faithful to its trust, which will not keep the lamp burning brightly, but suffers it to grow dim, He will come and visit in chastisement, if it will not repent.

By the removal of the candlestick we would understand the withdrawal of grace and gospel privileges from that Church, and the bestowal of these upon others. Just as the Jews, who knew not the day of their visitation, had the offers of mercy withdrawn, and, because of their wilful blindness and obduracy, beheld the blessings which were within their reach bestowed upon the Gentiles; so here the Church at Ephesus, although highly favoured and commended as it had been for its works, labour, and patience, yet, because of its having grown weary in well-doing, because of its having relaxed its speed in running the heavenly race, is now threatened with the removal of its lampstand. It is not the extinction of the light that is here implied, for if that had been so, the judgment would have been general, and the means of grace would have been rendered void; but, in the removal of the lamp from one place, its light would be enjoyed in another, where perhaps it would be more appreciated, and where more extended usefulness would follow. The lamp, owing to neglect, had lost much of its original lustre, and, if moved out of its place, others would trim it, and the light would diffuse itself more brightly, and with greater benefit. As the persecutions, which the early Christians suffered, drove them from place to place, the principles of Christianity were extended, and good was brought out of evil; so the withdrawal of the lamp from Ephesus would only prove a blessing to some other locality which was yet in darkness and the

shadow of death. But the threatening is conditional, "*except thou repent.*" We may believe that there was repentance exercised, for there was a flourishing Christian Church at Ephesus after St. John's time, when St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote an Epistle to it, congratulating the Ephesians on their high dignity as being initiated into the mysteries of the gospel, together with Paul, the sanctified; and we cannot forget that in the second century it was at Ephesus Justin Martyr held a conference with Trypho the Jew, and that one of the first four General Councils was held at Ephesus in A.D. 431, for the purpose of condemning the Nestorian heresy, which regarded Christ as possessing two distinct personalities that, in their operations, had only one aspect. The candlestick was not then removed, but it was withdrawn afterwards; and, so completely has the threatening fallen upon that Church, that now the very name of Christianity has perished there.

It is in accordance with God's uniform plan that His coming to inflict punishment on guilty nations is delayed or hastened, according to the manner in which they manifest their penitence or impenitence. It was so during the time His longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, and it is so now to the world at large. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." For His ancient people's sake, He kept back the rushing tide, He made the heavenly bodies cease their motions in their orbits, and He delays His Second Advent until opportunities of repentance are afforded, so that the number of His redeemed may be gathered in. The removal of the candlestick from Jerusalem was effected by the Roman general when he took the city. Literally, that seven-branched candlestick, or lampstand, which stood in the Holy Place, was carried away to Rome—and a *facsimile* of it is to

this day seen engraved on the Arch of Titus—typical indeed of what was afterwards to happen to the Church at Ephesus, and to all who are unfaithful in the positions of responsibility which they occupy in the house of God. We may suppose that this warning applied both to the Angel and people; and if anything would tend to stimulate the former to fresh zeal, and enable him to reach again that stage of Christian love from which he had fallen, it is the threatening of the removal of the candlestick. To see all his work rendered nugatory—to lose "the joy and crown" which those whom he had committed to his care should be, if he had proved faithful—to lose that exalted position which they who turn many to righteousness should attain in Christ's kingdom—this thought should have been quite sufficient to lead him to repent.

Ver. 6. *Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν· ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ, but this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* After our Lord had censured the Angel of the Church at Ephesus for departing from first love, and called upon the Church, through its representative, to repent, He recurs to praise. He began with making mention of the good deeds of the Church at Ephesus, especially in its intolerance of evil, and now He has recourse to another subject, wherein He finds occasion to approve. Whether the words in verse 2, "And that thou canst not bear them which are evil," are only reiterated here in a more express form, and with greater emphasis, where the concrete is used for the abstract, has been disputed. The sect here spoken of had not been mentioned previously, and it would seem that, after censure had been administered, our blessed Lord would heal the wound He had inflicted by finding another redeeming quality in that Church in its intolerance of evil, by its hating the works of the Nicolaitans, which Christ also hated—not the individuals

themselves, but their *works*, as the heathen poet[1] has it: "Pacem cum hominibus, bellum cum vitiis habe." It is not clear what that sect was, or whether in the time of St. John there was any sect in existence that bore that name. In the second century there was a sect of Nicolaitans who were Antinomian Gnostics, and of whose teachings and practices Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria both write. That unbridled licentiousness was a prominent feature in their character we have ample historic proofs; but that the Nicolaitans of the second century were the spiritual representatives of those mentioned in the address to the Church at Ephesus, we have no possibility of ascertaining. It has been thought that the Nicolaitans were a sect that arose in the Apostolic age, and had for its founder one of the seven Deacons, Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch. Ewald points to the fact as suggestive that Nicolas is last enumerated in the list of the Deacons, just as Judas Iscariot is last placed in the list of the Apostles. It certainly does not appear from the Acts of the Apostles that there was an apostate among the Deacons. Irenæus was the first to charge Nicolas of Antioch with departure from the faith, and leading a corrupt life; but Clement of Alexandria[2] denied that such a charge was well founded, and states that the heretics who were known by the name of Nicolaitans were not followers of the proselyte of Antioch. On the contrary, they perverted the teaching of Nicolas, who let a word drop, "that the flesh ought to be abused," meaning, that we should regulate our desires, and control and suppress our inclinations to concupiscence and libertinism; but these men taught that the flesh ought to be abused by punishing and afflicting it; and that they might give loose reins to their lusts, and indulge their sinful passions until their capability for

[1] Publius Syrus, B.C. 44.

[2] Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, iii. 4.

indulgence had passed away. Then they could say that the flesh had been so far subdued, that lust had no power over them. The two principal tenets which they espoused seem to have been the turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and eating meats sacrificed to idols. Irenæus[1] tells us they made no difference in regard to such matters, as if they were allowable under the gospel: "Nullam differentiam esse docentes in mœchando et idolothyton edere." He also says they were a branch of the Gnostics, and it was against them St. John wrote the Gospel. Their denial that Christ had come in the flesh we may consider as characteristic of them as of Docetæ, Cerinthians, or other heretics who were imbued with Gnostic principles, all of whom disowned, in a greater or less degree, the gospel teaching regarding the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Christ.

Michaelis considers the name, "Nicolaitan," to be derived from the Greek word Νικόλαος, *Conqueror of the people*, and which is the Greek synonym for בִּלְעָם *Bileam*, which has the same signification, Balaam being composed of two Hebrew words בָּלַע (*Belang*) and עָם (*am*), Destroyer of the people, or absorbens populum, or victor populi. In the Revelation there are such bipartite applications of Hebrew and Greek names, *ex. gr.* Apollyon, Abaddon, Devil, Satan, yea (*vaì*) and *ἀμήν*.[2] In this view these persons called by the name, Nicolaitans, were not then formed into a sect, but were professing Christians who, like Balaam, were, for personal ends, perverting the truth of God, in order to gratify their corrupt hearts by encouraging practices which were subversive of all true morality, and bringing upon themselves swift destruction. Balaam not only departed from the way of godliness to gratify his love of lucre, but he gave counsel to Balak of the most impious character, in order to allure the people into idolatry and licentiousness, so that they might become an easy prey to the

[1] *Iren.* i. 29. [2] Archbp. Trench, *Epist. to Seven Churches*, p. 85.

Moabites.[1] Now in the case of these professors of Christianity who were called, *devourers of the people*, there was not only a departure from all Christian precepts, but under pretence of liberty there was an utter disregard of all law. The early Church had chiefly to guard its converts from becoming again enslaved with the bondage of Judaism; but now the danger lies in quite another direction. These seducers abuse Christian liberty. They make it a cloke of maliciousness. Indulge your propensities, say they, to any extent you please. Eat meats sacrificed to idols—the idol is nothing—you Christians know that those gods to whom meat is offered have no existence; and you show by partaking in meats offered to idols that you believe they have no existence. You show your superiority of knowledge, and your strength of faith. In the abstract this may be true, yet eating things sacrificed to idols must be viewed in regard to the effect produced on others, and our liberty may then become a stumbling block. Hence, among other things, this practice was condemned by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 28); because, if weak brethren see meats offered in sacrifice to idols eaten in their presence, they may consider such participation as a conniving at idolatry, and a tacit acknowledgment of idol worship. The same might be said in regard to meats unclean under the Jewish law. If indulged in, weak brethren might suppose the Levitical law was not from God; but, under other circumstances, St. Paul lays down the rule that every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. The early Christians had no slight difficulty to contend with in the matter of idol meats, for their heathen persecutors, in order to tempt them, caused all animals to be slaughtered at heathen altars, and sprinkled with libations from these altars, before meat was offered for sale. These Nicolaitans committed sin wilfully under pretence that their

[1] Num. xxxi. 16, comp. with Rev. ii. 14.

knowledge and faith were such as to prevent any injury arising from the act, just as their ideas of mortification of the flesh led them to exercise themselves in all manner of sinful indulgences: Eat idol meats, and you show you care nothing for the idol; indulge in sin, and you will the sooner mortify the deeds of the body! These teachings the Church at Ephesus had repudiated and condemned, and our blessed Lord would show that He heartily commended the Church for this, by adding the words, ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ, *which I also hate.* The protest of the Church at Ephesus against such pernicious teachings as those of the Nicolaitans, was a sign that there was still life in her. Although she had left her first love, and that early affection seemed to have got into the condition described as that of "decaying and waxing old," it had not yet "vanished away." There was still existing the spark which might be again fannned into a flame; and there was still hope that Ephesus would recover from her decline of spiritual fervour, and bear a noble testimony for Christ. So long as hatred of that which God hates characterizes a Church, there is evidence of the activity of conscience; and though there may not be that living force which showed itself in early times, yet in upholding the truth against God-dishonouring error, there is one mark of earnestness—the earnestness of contending for the faith once delivered to the saints—which the Head of the Church will not fail to notice and recognise with approbation.

The words, "which I also hate," show us how closely Christ is scrutinizing the conduct of Churches as well as individuals; and while He is the Love that was manifested, He will not permit sin to escape unpunished; while He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has power to tread down His enemies. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little

Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Ps. ii. 12). If the Church at Ephesus had borne with these evil workers, and had not rejected them from its communion, it would have been a proof that it acquiesced in their practices, and would have implied disaffection and disloyalty towards God. They were traitors to the King of heaven, and they must be expelled. It was not a matter of indifference whether they should remain in the Church. It was hateful to Christ—dishonouring to God, and injurious to men's souls—that they should be allowed to continue in fellowship; so our blessed Lord, while expressing approval of the Church's intolerance of evil, adds the words—"which I also hate." There are persons who think God cares little as to what men do: if so, why did He place us here at all? God takes cognisance of everything done, whether by Churches or individuals; and He hates sin—His nature shrinks from it, just as the sensitive plant shrinks from the human touch; He hates the sin, while He loves the sinner—"Amat errantes, odit errores"; and we should observe that Christ specially makes the distinction here, "*which* (works) ἃ ἔργα, I also hate."

Ver. 7. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, *he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.* These words show that the subject-matter of the Message to the Church at Ephesus was of primary importance, and that it not only concerned that Church directly, but all Churches. What was written for one was written for all. It is repeated seven times; in the first three, it stands before the promise with which each Epistle ends; and in the last four, it comes after it. Whether there is any good reason for this order, we have no means of ascertaining. This formula our Lord had frequently used, if not exactly in the same words, at least in meaning—"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. xi. 15; xiii. 9). Christ's

words demand attention, and the repetition of this saying in every Epistle shows how listless and indifferent men are even to the weightiest utterances of Him who speaks to us from Heaven. The words and sayings of Christ, when uttered in the ears of the world, resemble Himself in this respect—there is no beauty in them that men should desire them. In the days when He was on earth, how needful was the oft repeated saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," to rouse the careless and inattentive to listen to His arguments, exhortations, and instructions. And now that He is sending a Message to the Church at Ephesus, the same urgent call to attention is still necessary. He will not suffer the Church to close its ears to His warnings and encouragements. If its members are any of them in spiritual slumber, He will kindly awake them as He did His disciples in the garden, and impress upon them the duty of watchfulness.

The words of the prophets were greater than the prophets themselves; but the words of Christ added nothing to Himself. They were uttered by Him who spake as never did man. And why is it that men are so slow to hear the saying of Christ? Because they are not addressed merely to the natural ear, but to the spiritual; and "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto Him: neither can He know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). We need not to be reminded of worldly considerations, or to have them enforced by precept. We instinctively lay hold upon them. They require no public proclamation to commend them, or to make their reception acceptable. But it is different in matters of religion. It was so even when our Lord was upon earth. Those who then lived enjoyed a sight, and heard truths, which it had never been the privilege of mankind before to share in; and yet, "Eyes have you, but ye see not; ears, and ye hear not," were the reproaches which frequently

fell from the Saviour's lips when addressing the people of that age—and why?—Because it is so difficult to rouse us from the engrossing concerns of time, and to lead us to fix our thoughts on the unseen and eternal. We are chained down to earth as if we were in a prison, and it is only when the soul gets unfettered that we can "trace our better portion." We need the eyes of the understanding enlightened, and the ears unstopped, so that we may gaze in rapture upon Christ, and catch sweet sounds from the upper Sanctuary; and this we shall be enabled to do, if we only come to Him who has all fulness, and offer the prayer of the Psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things in Thy law." Only when, like the Patriarch of Uz, we have our spiritual organs touched, we shall be enabled to say—"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5, 6). But these words are addressed to all—"He that hath an ear, let him hear." There is no exception; the application is wide as humanity. As the offer of the gospel is universal—"Ho! every one that thirsteth"—so is the call in this passage. "Awake, and Christ shall give thee light." "Hear, and your soul shall live." In exercising the hearing ear, just like the man who had the withered hand, there will come forth power and blessing from Him who, in the use of means on our part, waits to bestow the blessing. We are called upon to hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

There are two important truths conveyed to us here. (1) That as the Son and the Father are one, so Christ and the Spirit are one. The Message to the Church at Ephesus was sent by Christ, yet He Himself calls upon all who have ears to hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches. It was the office of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us; and while the message is Christ's, the Spirit's office is to make it known to the Churches—to apply it to

the hearts and consciences of men, and make them see, in the condition of the Ephesian Church, those phases of character which would be either patterns for imitation on the one side, or beacons to warn of danger on the other. He is still declaring what Christ has revealed, and while He is an abiding influence in the Churches, imparting guidance and shedding illumination, He does not leave the world absolutely to itself, but exerts upon the wills and hearts of men, a softening influence; hence we see an elevation of character on the part of some who are strangers to the gospel, and who never would have had that elevation but for Christianity, the claims of which they either neglect or ignore. (2) The call which is contained in this verse is to the Churches. Our Lord had only sent a message to one Church, and yet He says in that one message, the Spirit was speaking to the Churches at large. Not merely the Church, or Churches, at Ephesus, but all without exception.

It has already been observed that in the seven Churches all professing Christian Churches are represented. There is no state of spiritual progress that is not directly or indirectly noticed; and in every condition conceivable, there are words addressed to each Church, whether of encouragement or reproof, warning or approbation, so that when the Churches are in possession of the entire Epistles addressed to them, they are left without excuse. If they relax their love, zeal and devotion to Christ, they must do so wilfully, and they can never plead that they were ignorant of the claims which He who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks had upon them. The words of Christ will stand for ever. They are spoken with an authority which man could never claim. They are no vague obscure guesses; they are immutable and infallible truth, before which we are to bow with a docile spirit, and which we are to lay up in our hearts and practise in our lives. The truth of God is spoken now to the

Churches as it was eighteen centuries ago, yet it is the same, having undergone no fresh change with the lapse of time. The empire of the Cæsars has passed and gone—the proud legions of imperial Rome are mouldering in the dust—and the crescent waxes pale, almost ready to vanish away; but the Words of Christ still survive. "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. xii. 28).

Ver. 7. *Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὅ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, to him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of My God.* The word *μου* is omitted in the Alexandrine and the Codex Ephraem Syri, but is found in the Vatican MS. and many Cursives. Why it has not been retained in the Revised Version does not clearly appear. In Rev. iii. 12, this reading occurs in four clauses of the verse; and that verse contains the promise to the Church in Philadelphia; and from analogy one would think the same reading should occur here. Archbishop Trench believes that the omission from early MSS. was in order to avoid anything disparaging to the Divinity of Christ, as the Arian heresy was widespread at the time when these MSS. were written. But this could scarcely be, for we find our Lord saying to Mary after His resurrection—"I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God" (John xx. 17); and besides, if it was to guard against Arian tendencies, why not omit it also in Rev. iii. 12? There is again the word, *αὐτῷ*, after *τῷ νικῶντι—to him that overcometh, to him*, etc. The object of this repetition would seem to be to render the verse more emphatic. The expression, "to him that overcometh," is used in the promise to each of the seven Churches, and it is clearly intended to show that the Christ-

ian course is a life-long struggle—a battle to be fought, and a victory to be won—a race to be run in the stadium, and a prize to the successful competitor. He who will wear the crown must be prepared to bear the cross—to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. This expression is one which occurs no fewer than twenty times in the writings of St. John. The keynote, which he took up, was given by Christ in the concluding portion of the discourse at the Last Supper, just before His Intercessory prayer—"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." That made an impression upon him which was never forgotten. In his Epistles, this idea of Christian warfare is found in 1 John ii. 13, 14; iv. 4; v. 4, 5; and in the messages to the Churches of Asia Minor, there is a promise connected with the faithfulness with which the struggle has been conducted, and corresponding to the character of the work in which each Church was engaged. It is obvious that the circumstances of all Churches are not alike, nor are the dangers and difficulties which beset them of the same nature. What had the Church of Ephesus to contend with? Clearly the evil workers who were propagating the Nicolaitan heresy. The world and its pleasures were the chief good, which had been placed above all spiritual considerations, and these Christian professors were carried away by its attractions. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, were the gods they worshipped, and the Almighty was dethroned. The world is ever exerting its power to dethrone Christ in the soul. It tells the young man who came running to Christ with the question, "What good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?" that he must not forego his prosperity, or station, or rank, to follow the fortunes of One who had not where to lay His head. It says to Demas, the companion of St. Paul in the prison of Rome, why should you exchange your liberty and enjoyment at Thessalonica for the dreary dungeon and its

wretched fare? It presents its glittering bribes before the eyes of its votaries, and tries to dazzle with its tinselled glare the thoughtless and unsuspecting, asking in exchange for its worthless wares the priceless value of immortal souls.

And what is the world? Certainly not the natural world which God, when He had created it, pronounced very good; and which, although now marred by sin, yet still possesses evidence of God's handiwork, and traces of its pristine beauty. The world is something impalpable to sense. It is whatever object we make our chief good instead of God, and which thus becomes a hindrance to us on the path to heaven. And in the case of the Church at Ephesus, it is something in its favour that it exercised self-denial, in abstaining from sacrificial meats, and fornication, while there were so many temptations placed in its way. The members of that Church were encouraged to war a good warfare against evil, while they were to follow peace with all men. They were not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good. The world, like some fair enchantress, held out to them "the pleasures of sin for a season," and seemed to say, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound," but well they knew that its friendship would only be enmity to God; and they are encouraged to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. While as soldiers of the cross, we have to wage war with sin, we are not sent defenceless into the arena of conflict. The weapons of the Christian are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; and if they are only kept bright by prayer, they shall always be found equal to every emergency.

If the world presents its attractions, we should not be allured by its smiles. It will to-day cry "Hosanna," and to-morrow "Crucify," as it did to our blessed Lord. Whatever may be its fascinations, there are counter ones incomparably more worthy of our regard. What are its brightest joys

when compared with the joy realized at the Cross of Christ, the joy of repentant sinners returning to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, the joy and peace in believing, the joy which is unaffected by external circumstances—alike filling the soul with its pure and warm emotion, in the sunshine of prosperity and the winter of adversity—because it is fed from the perennial spring of the Saviour's love, and therefore in those who experience it, "a well of living water springing up into everlasting life"? Let it not be supposed that evil is inevitable—that it is either the result of an evil principle, and therefore resistless, or that it is a part of the Divine activity, as the Pantheist says, and therefore may be treated with complacency. It is the work of the perverse will of man himself—it is the abuse of the gift of God against himself—"Binding nature fast in fate, He left free the human will,"—and evil is the rejection of the law of his being on the part of man, the turning away of his desire from the true Centre of his existence, like as if one of the worlds in space were to get detached from its proper orbit. "Wandering stars," St. Jude calls false professors: having got out of their true path, they rush on, regardless of any controlling influence. If the power of Christ were not supreme, then might we be at times discouraged; but He has already triumphed—"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." His passive virtues were stronger than the active energies of His assailants—His patience and heroic endurance, His humility and meekness, His Divine charity and world-embracing forgiveness, praying for His enemies—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—these were the unseen yet all-powerful influences by which our Master won His triumphs; and it is by these secret forces—for "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation"—that the Christian's success in life's battle will be achieved. Under Him, who is the Captain of our salvation, we shall, in the exercise of these

hidden springs of action, go forth with an assured hope, and be crowned with certain victory.

δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν, κ.τ.λ., *to him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of my God.* The word δώσω, "*I will give*," shows that the conferring of the reward is in the hands of Christ. This is so stated in 2 Tim. iv. 8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." This throws light on that passage in Matt. xx. 23, where Christ said to the two sons of Zebedee, "Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left, is not Mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of My Father." This passage in the Authorized Version was always felt to be unsatisfactory in its rendering, as the words which are found in italics, not being in the original Greek, were inserted by the translators without any authority, and counter to the express statements of other portions of Holy Scripture. The Revised Version was looked forward to as likely to correct the false rendering in question, but in vain do we look for any change for the better. Rather the filling up of the deficiency in the passage is for the worse—because a new idea is imported, and a new verb, *is*. As it reads in the Revised Version, it takes the gift equally out of the hands of Christ; and there is no warrant whatever for the gloss put upon it by the Revisionists. As it now stands it is as follows: "but to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give, but *it is for them* for whom it hath been prepared of My Father." This is entirely contrary to the promise made by our Lord to the Church at Ephesus. The words in the Greek are οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι ἀλλ' οἷς ἡτοίμασται ὑπὸ τοῦ Πατρός μου, and there surely cannot be much difficulty in

rendering them simply as they stand: *It is not Mine to give* (ἀλλὰ) *save to those for whom it has been prepared of My Father.* The word ἀλλὰ in Matt. xix. 11, and Mark ix. 8, is used in this sense; and this is in accordance with the right of Christ to bestow the gift. He would not grant it as a mere boon or favour, or in respect of persons; but he would give it according to a fixed rule laid down by God, "for what things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John v. 19). As all judgment is committed to the Son, so the distribution of rewards will be in His gift, and He will dispense them with unerring justice and perfect impartiality.[1]

φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου, κ.τ.λ., *to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of My God.* The imagery is here taken from the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis; and the allurements which were presented to the Church at Ephesus to eat things sacrificed to idols are here set aside by a counter attraction—the fascination of fleshly indulgence is met by the promise of one of a higher and more worthy character. To him who would exercise self-denial, and abstain from partaking of dainties which had come from the idol temple, and which in their use was dishonouring to God, to Him there would be meat provided that the world knows nothing of—he should "eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of My God."

By eating of the forbidden tree, our first parents lost the enjoyment and comfort of the tree of life; but Christ has removed the penalty attached to that first act of disobedience, and has given the promise of enjoyment of that tree around which cherubim and a flaming sword had been placed, and which represented the immortality of bliss in glory. In Gen. iii. 23, 24, we are told that God drove out the guilty pair from Eden, and placed at the east of the garden, cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every

[1] Compare comment on Rev. i. 9.

way to keep the way of the tree of life. Can we doubt that in those cherubim was typified the Church of Christ—and that that flaming sword, or literally the *flame of a sword turning itself* was a symbol of the Divine presence, which afterwards manifested itself in the tabernacle and temple as the Shekinah. That flame had a twofold effect: it was fitted not only to deter the unrepentant sinner—to tell him "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"; but also the symbol was designed to keep the way of the tree of life, not that all access to it was shut—that no mortal should again taste of its fruit, for here and in xxii. 14, there is a promise of admission to this privilege, which was to be enjoyed when the appointed time had come. Fairbairn, in his *Typology of Scripture*, vol. i. pp. 253–255, truly observes: "The privilege of partaking its immortal fruit was only withheld for a season, not finally withdrawn—waiting until a righteousness should be brought in, which might again open the way to its blessed provisions." And the Jews had some expectation of this, for the same author says: "Of the seven things which they imagined the Messiah would show to Israel, two were the garden of Eden and the tree of life. And they declare there are those who say of the tree of life that it was not created in vain; but the men of the resurrection shall eat thereof and live for ever." The flame in the midst of the cherubim taught that man should not be banished for ever from God's presence, but that God should dwell in the midst of His Church; and that in resurrection glory one of the enjoyments of His redeemed people should be to eat of the tree of life "in the midst of the Paradise of My God." God dwelt at Eden after the Fall to keep the way to the tree of life open, as well as to keep the impenitent from access; and in those symbols which were placed at the east of the garden we have an intimation that, while God is just, He is the justifier of all who believe on His Son, in whose atoning work "mercy

and truth meet together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Probably the object of that manifestation in Eden was to prevent the possibility of sun worship; but primarily the design was from the beginning to have a revelation of mercy, and to show that while the Divine presence visibly manifested itself to the ancient Church, that was only an earnest and pledge of Incarnate God, in the person of Jesus Christ, tabernacling among men, who beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.[1]

The tree of life in Eden has its counterpart in Christ, as Rev. xxii. 2, clearly indicates. "The restitution of all things" by Christ presented to the eye of faith a more beautiful Paradise than the earthly one; and eating of the tree of life in the Paradise of God is a figurative expression, denoting that the Christian conqueror would enjoy glory, honour, and immortality in heaven. To the Jewish mind "Paradise" would convey the idea of a beautiful garden, with all manner of trees and pleasant fruits, watered by refreshing streams, and fanned by the soft breezes of the south; and our Lord would make use of this word to describe the fruition of that life which was to be participated in when this mortal shall have put on immortality. "Paradise" in this passage involves more than is conveyed to us by our Lord's words to the dying malefactor (Luke xxiii. 43), "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Paradise is a region of the unseen world where disembodied spirits are kept until the Day of Resurrection. Thither our blessed Lord went between His death and resurrection.

In Hades, or the unseen world, all, whether good or bad, await their final destiny. This intermediate state does not necessarily imply either happiness or misery, although according to our life here shall we experience the one or the other.

[1] See *The Church in the Cherubim*, by Tanner, pp. 57–82.

That there is a separation in Hades, or the invisible world, we may gather from the great gulf fixed between Lazarus and the Rich Man, the one being comforted while the other was tormented. The place of the lost has never yet been tenanted, and never shall be until after the Resurrection, when Death and Hades shall give up their dead. Now the promise which is made to the Church at Ephesus cannot be merely that of the imperfect condition of souls in the invisible world, for that would have ministered small encouragement to maintain the Christian struggle; but it is "the Paradise of My God," which corresponds with the dwelling place of God, or heaven. Thither the Apostle of the Gentiles was borne—to the third heaven, or heaven of heavens, the region where the Angels of glory stand around God's throne and enjoy the Beatific Vision. He was also carried to "Paradise," which he distinguishes from the third heaven. In the one he beheld the heavenly glory; in the other he saw the ante-room of the palace of the Great King. The one was a remote object of hope, the other was near; and in the immediate prospect of entering into a state of blessedness from a world of sin, there were ministered to him comfort and encouragement in his sufferings, and unequivocal proof as to how light were these sufferings when compared with the glory that should be revealed.

The promise to the Church at Ephesus embraces a great deal more than a transition from earth to the unseen world; it reaches to the scenes which are to take place after the general Resurrection and the great Judgment Day. Between death and the resurrection there will be an existence in a disembodied state, but happiness and misery will be imperfect; and not only will there be existence, but conscious existence. There can be no annihilation. There never has been any annihilation of matter since the creation of the world—matter has been transformed, but has never been struck out of

existence; nor has there been any annihilation of force—force may have been transmuted, but it has never been lost. The sun's heat which has been stored up in plant and tree can never be annihilated; and what has once been endowed with the gift of life can never perish. So our Lord told the disciples to fear not them which kill the body and are not able to kill the soul, but rather to fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.

Here our Lord clearly shows that something shall still survive when human life has been sacrificed to truth and duty, and which may be lost if the lower life be more highly prized than the higher. What was the condition of our Lord's human spirit between His death and resurrection? He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit (1 Pet. iii. 18). His human spirit being liberated by death from the burden of the flesh, acquired new life by death—gained new powers, and travelled into the region of disembodied spirits. His human spirit was not in any way impaired by death; and hence there is to us the assurance that our spirits, on their dissolution from the body, will not lose any of their energies. "The Paradise of My God" reaches to the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. To this the Church of God has been looking forward in earnest expectancy. She has yet to wait, but one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. There will be first the glorious reign of Christ on earth with His risen saints, then the general judgment, and the final conflagration, when the earth and the things thereon shall be burnt up; and out of this dissolved world there shall arise a new earth, with a new aerial firmament; so that this world upon which we now live and move and have our being, shall be yet fitted up as one of the many mansions for God's redeemed family. The earth was cursed for the sake of man, and it will share in the restoration from

the curse—subjected to vanity (or weakness) through no fault of its own, but subjected in hope, that as it has sympathized with man in his bondage, so it shall share in the glorious deliverance in Christ. All things lost by the Fall shall be restored in Christ.

The occupation of the new heaven and new earth is the theme of "the elders'" song; it is the promise given to the "meek" (Ps. xxxvii. 11, compared with Matt. v. 5). Canaan was promised to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession. All he ever yet possessed of it was a grave. He was a stranger in a strange land; and it is only in the new heaven and new earth that he shall obtain personal inheritance. New Jerusalem shall descend from heaven from God—quite distinct from the earthly Jerusalem in which Israel in the flesh are to dwell during the Millennium. This will be the City of God on earth, not mere Paradise as Eden was. It will be a city built of living stones, each prepared for its place, and in it God will tabernacle with men in the glory of His manifested Godhead. This will be "the Paradise of My God," into which he that overcometh shall be admitted, whence no friend can ever depart—where no enemy can ever enter—where we shall behold the Saviour's face, and be crowned as kings and priests unto God, and serve Him day and night in His temple—"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it." It has been noticed that there is a beautiful gradation in the promises given to the seven Churches—that there is an ascending scale of dignity and blessedness; and if we examine these promises we shall see how they exceed one another in greatness; but he who has the privilege of "eating of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of My God," will have his perfect consummation in bliss. To reach the eternal throne, to behold the eternal glory, to hold communion with Christ, in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand

there are pleasures for evermore—this should satisfy the highest aspirations of every longing heart, and compensate for all the sorrows and sufferings we have had to endure in this troublesome world.

It would seem as if there were different degrees of glory to be enjoyed by the respective Churches, from the participating in the tree of life, or holding communion with Christ, to the sitting with Christ upon His throne. We know that one star differs from another star in glory, yet each may shine in perfection, although the capacity of the one may be less than that of the other; so the image of God will shine in some with greater splendour and intensity than in others. The more we grow in grace here, the higher rank shall we take in heaven; and in proportion to the manner in which we have been faithful to the trust committed to us, so shall our dignity and glory be hereafter.

What the Church at Ephesus did to retrieve her backsliding does not appear. We know that the disciple of St. John and Apostolic Father, St. Ignatius,[1] Bishop of Antioch, wrote an Epistle to that Church in the beginning of the second century, A.D. 107, and that he speaks of its members as initiated with Paul the sanctified into the mysteries of the gospel, of having rekindled their life, of carrying God and Christ in their hearts, and of having become *Theophori* (temples of God), and *Christophori* (temples of Christ). St. Ignatius mentions Onesimus as the Bishop of Ephesus at that time, and, while referring to him in terms of the highest praise, thanks God for having given him to them, and speaks of them as "worthy of him." There is evidence from this Epistle that the Church had then recovered from her declension, for Ignatius commends the Ephesians for living according to the truth, having no heresy dwelling among them, hearkening to no one more than to Jesus Christ, and for

[1] Ignat., *Ep. to Eph.*, 9, 12; comp. *Ep. to Magnes.*, 12.

having stopped their ears that they might not receive the things sown by some who passed by, having perverse doctrine.

From that period onward the Church at Ephesus shone brightly, permitting no heresy to mar its lustre, or detract from its fame as the great central Church of Asia Minor, until, rent asunder by the strifes, divisions, and heresies which prevailed in the fifth century, its light faded away—its candlestick was finally removed—and for long ages no trace has been discovered of a Christian Church ever having been there.

Amid the ruins of Ephesus we may sadly learn that our Lord's threatening has been literally fulfilled. Gibbon (vol. iv. p. 260) writes: "In the loss of Ephesus, the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation; the desolation is complete; and the temple of Diana, or the church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveller." Dr. Chandler says of it: "Its fate is that of the entire country—a garden has become a desert. Busy centres of civilization, spots where the refinements and delights of the age were collected, are now a prey to silence, destruction, and death. Consecrated, first of all, to the purposes of idolatry, Ephesus next had Christian temples almost rivalling the Pagan in splendour, wherein the image of the great Diana lay prostrate before the cross: after the lapse of some centuries, Jesus gave way to Mohammed, and the crescent glittered on the dome of the recently Christian church. A few more scores of years, and Ephesus has neither temple, cross, crescent, nor city, but is desolation, a dry land and a wilderness." The same writer adds: "The present state of Ephesus affords a striking illustration of the accomplishment of prophecy. Ephesus is the first of the Apocalyptic Churches addressed by the Evangelist in the name of Christ: his charge against her is a declension in religious fervour (Rev. ii. 4), and his threat in consequence (Rev. ii. 5), a total

extinction of her ecclesiastical brightness. After a protracted struggle with the sword of Rome and the sophisms of the Gnostics, Ephesus at last gave way. The incipient indifference, censured by the warning voice of the prophet, increased to total forgetfulness, till at length the threatenings of the Apocalypse were fulfilled, and Ephesus sunk with the general overthrow of the Greek Empire in the fourteenth century."

Truly may it be said that when a Church loses its first love to God, it has got upon an inclined plane that will bring not only degradation upon itself, but scatter ruin broadcast around it. Ephesus is a warning to all Churches to be faithful, to keep up the life of religion as well as the form, and to remember that it is only they who endure to the end that shall be saved. Better not to have known the way of righteousness than to have departed from the holy commandment delivered unto them. Beginning in the Spirit, it is a melancholy spectacle to end in the flesh. We cannot retrace our steps so easily, for our previous high attainments and Christian graces will be swift witnesses against us. It is not sufficient to know the Master's commands; true happiness is found in doing them.

II.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA.

8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς, καὶ ἔζησεν·

9 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν θλῖψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, (ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ) καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ.

10 Μὴ φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν· ἰδοὺ δὴ μέλλει βαλεῖν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν, ἵνα πειρασθῆτε· καὶ ἕξετε θλῖψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα·. Γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

11 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις· Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῇ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and lived *again*.

9 I know thy works, and thy tribulation, and thy poverty, (but thou art rich) and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but a synagogue of Satan.

10 Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer; behold already the devil is about to cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

II.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA.

Chap. ii. 8–12.

Ver. 8. *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write.* Smyrna is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, so that we have no means of ascertaining when and by whom the Christian faith was first planted there. We may however conjecture that that great commercial city did not escape attention either by St. Paul or his associates in missionary effort, during his three years' stay at Ephesus. Smyrna stands at the head of one of the finest bays in the world, and from its central position, its easy access and excellent harbour, it commands the commerce of the Levant. It is the chief city of Ionia, and is situate about forty miles north of Ephesus. It was a very ancient city, and was one of seven that claimed to be the birthplace of Homer; and it is considered that its claim in this respect was better founded than that of any of the other cities which contended for the honour. It was subject to various vicissitudes both physically and politically. It was overthrown by earthquakes, damaged by conflagrations, laid waste by invasion, and held in turn by Æolians, Ionians, Lydians, and Macedonians. In A.D. 177, it was destroyed by an earthquake, but rebuilt by Marcus Aurelius, with more than its former splendour. It is now one of the most flourishing of the cities of Asia Minor, and indeed the most important. Its population amounts to 140,000, of whom

there are 20,000 Greeks, 8,000 Armenians, about 2,000 Europeans, and 9,000 Jews. There are more Christians in Smyrna than in any other Turkish city in the world; and it is therefore peculiarly unclean in the eyes of the strict Moslems, who call it *Giaour Izmir*, or Infidel Smyrna.

Religious toleration has always been more fully permitted in Smyrna than in other cities under Mahommedan control, and rarely has Turkish fanaticism been directed against Europeans. It is a great centre of missionary effort, and in Smyrna the light of Christianity has never been extinct from Apostolic times. Yet we are not to suppose that Christians have not been subject to severe persecutions. Trials, courage, faithfulness, and constancy, are the key-notes of the message to the Church at Smyrna. It was as famous for the worship of Dionysos, as Ephesus was for the worship of Diana. The Dionysia, or festivals in honour of Bacchus, were amongst the most debasing and demoralizing spectacles which heathendom ever introduced, and contributed greatly to the corruption of morals among all ranks of the people. Vast numbers of Jews had congregated in Smyrna for the sake of commerce, and whenever they had the opportunity of resisting Christianity, they were not less zealous than Alexander the coppersmith, and his companions at Ephesus, in waging war against its supporters; and the missionaries of the Cross had as much to fear from them as from the Bacchus worshippers with whom they were surrounded. It is thought, not without some probability, that the martyrdom of Germanicus and others of Smyrna, who suffered under Marcus Aurelius, is alluded to in the passage where it is said—"the devil shall cast some of you into prison"; and we know from the manner in which the Jews joined with satanic rage in carrying out the martyrdom of Polycarp, how virulent they were in their persecution of the Christians, and how powerful as a body they were in Smyrna.

Smyrna, in ecclesiastical history, is celebrated as the Church over which Polycarp presided as Bishop. Polycarp was the disciple of St. John, and there is a strong probability that he was the Angel of the Church here addressed. He was contemporary with St. Ignatius, who was also a disciple of St. John, and who suffered martyrdom in A.D. 107, eleven years after the Messages to the Churches were delivered. Now there are two letters of Ignatius extant,—one addressed to the Church at Smyrna, written by him from Troas, and the other addressed directly to Polycarp, who was then Bishop of Smyrna. Archbishop Usher is at considerable pains to show that Polycarp was the Angel of the Church at Smyrna, over which Church he must have presided seventy-four years. That he was an extremely old man when in A.D. 167, he suffered martyrdom, we learn from the interrogation of the proconsul, who after asking him if he was Polycarp, added, "Have pity on thy own great age." When further urged to reproach Christ and his life would be spared, he said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath never wronged me, and how can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me?" These eighty and six years cannot be the entire age of Polycarp, but the period which elapsed from his conversion, which must have taken place according to this calculation in A.D. 81, so that fifteen years must have passed from the time he first knew Christ until the Epistle to the Church at Smyrna was written. This, says Archbp. Trench, will afford quite sufficient time for his promotion to the highest seat of honour in the Church. But positive testimony is borne to this fact by Irenæus, who affirms that he had in his youth often talked with Polycarp, who had been consecrated Bishop of the Church of Smyrna by St. John; and like testimony is given by Tertullian, *De Præscrip. Hæret.*, 32. If then we are to regard Polycarp as the Angel of the Church of Smyrna, there will be considerable light thrown upon the particular refer-

ences mentioned in the message to that Church, especially those relating to them who say they are Jews, but are not; and the exhortation and promise at the end of the Epistle will have their apposite force and application.

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς, καὶ ἔζησεν· these things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and lived again. The Head of the Church here reveals Himself as One who had triumphed over death, and by that victory was able to sustain those who were about to undergo cruel torments and meet death in its most terrible form.

Wild beasts and fire were the dread alternatives which the heathen persecutors presented before the suffering Christians. When the proconsul said to Polycarp, "I have wild beasts; I will expose you to them unless you repent."—"Call them," replied the martyr; "our minds are not to be changed from the better to the worse, but it is a good thing to be changed from evil to good." "I will tame your spirit by fire," said the proconsul, "since you despise the wild beasts."—"You threaten me with fire," answered Polycarp, "which burns for a moment, and will be soon extinct; but you are ignorant of the future judgment, and of that fire that is reserved for the ungodly." What could have given martyrs such courage—what, but the conscious presence of Him who walked with the three children in the fiery furnace of Babylon? It is recorded that the multitude of Jews and Gentiles, who clamoured loudly against Polycarp, called on the Asiarch, Philip, that he would let loose a lion upon him; and the popular cry of the heathen in times of persecution was, "*Christianos ad Leonem!*" Now under such circumstances nothing could bear them up but the assurance that they were in the hands of Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"; who passed through the bitter pangs of death, and is now alive for evermore.

Death in its most appalling forms might be near at hand—

the most cruel persecution that ever was invented by the malignity of the servants of the Prince of Darkness might be imminent—but whence those fears? "When thou passest through the fires thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Like the bush at Horeb, the Church may burn, but it will not be consumed, for Christ is in the midst of it. They may kill the poor body, but they cannot kill the soul, which, when the earthly pitcher is broken, shall shine like Gideon's lamps. Like the chariot of fire in which the prophet ascended, so the flame of persecution, how fiercely soever it may burn, will only bear the soul of the martyr to the bosom of his God.

Ver. 9. *Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν θλῖψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, (ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ) καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ. I know thy works, and thy tribulation, and thy poverty, (but thou art rich) and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but a synagogue of Satan.* What is here said of Smyrna is of the highest praise. There is no admixture of blame in it. Christ was walking in the midst of that Church, and was keenly observing all its doings, whether in upholding truth or witnessing against evil.[1] From the Epistle of Ignatius, written to the Smyrneans in A.D. 107, we may learn what the works of that Church were. They had weathered the storm of persecution in the time of Domitian, and had been "perfect in the immovable faith of our Lord Jesus Christ." They had resisted the inroads of the Docetæ, who were at that time endeavouring to introduce the heresy of a denial of Christ's perfect humanity, and for this they are highly commended; and he asks the Church to pray for these heretics that if possible they might be converted. They were careful to maintain the fundamental

[1] See on Rev. ii. 2, where this formula is considered.

principles of Christianity; they adhered closely to Christ, whose Godhead and manhood, whose atonement and intercession were unspeakably precious to them; and they were careful to withdraw themselves from those who were walking disorderly, or bringing in doctrines which were subversive of the truth. By these means the Church was kept pure, and the lamp of Divine truth was long preserved and made to burn with a bright and steady flame.

καὶ τὴν θλῖψιν, κ.τ.λ., *and thy tribulation, and thy poverty, (but thou art rich).* The Church at Smyrna was in deep affliction. When the message was sent to it, the persecution which had been raised by Domitian was felt everywhere throughout Asia Minor, but more so in those places where, owing to their easy access, the Roman power could exercise its full vigour, and where vast numbers of Jews had congregated,—for we are not to suppose the θλῖψις under which Smyrna was then suffering was instigated only by the heathen, but by Jews and heathen combined. Except from the Epistle to the Church at Smyrna, we have no means of ascertaining what was the nature of that tribulation the Church was then enduring. Its members were no doubt experiencing the effects of the wave which was then threatening to submerge the entire Church, and remove Christianity from the face of the earth. In the reign of Trajan, who succeeded Nerva, in A.D. 98, Christians were treated with great severity, and if they were not altogether exterminated, it was not owing to want of strong hatred and violent persecution against them. This may be inferred from the Emperor Trajan's interview with Ignatius, whom he met, when he came to Antioch, on his way to the Parthian war. When Ignatius called himself *Theophorus*, and told the Emperor he assumed this name, *because he carried Christ in his heart*, the Emperor replied: "Since Ignatius confesses that he carries within himself Him that was crucified, we command that he be carried, bound by

soldiers, to Great Rome, there to be thrown to the wild beasts for the entertainment of the people."

The sufferings of this Church were of no ordinary character. They were for the truth's sake, and sustained against terrible odds. "All the day long," we may well say, those humble Christians were "accounted as sheep appointed for the slaughter." It is harrowing to think what cruelties and barbarities the early Church had to meet at the hands of their persecutors; but the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church. Under each renewed tribulation it has come out of the fiery furnace with fresh beauty and splendour, inasmuch as in all the Church's affliction, her living Head and Lord was afflicted; and because in each special case of persecution He presented Himself to the Church in a peculiar manner, adapting Himself to her wants, and brightening her Cross with fresh glory. If there was fear of the Church at Ephesus relaxing its spirituality and zeal, He reminds it that He walks in the midst of the Churches to try the reins and search the hearts; and if He finds Smyrna faltering, or fearing the terrible forms of death which the Christians had to meet, He reminds them of His trials and triumphs, and that He is able to make them more than conquerors.

καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, κ.τ.λ., and thy poverty, (but thou art rich). This is the very opposite of what is said to the Church at Laodicea: "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," etc. This very poverty, under which the Church at Smyrna was labouring, may have been the result of the severe persecution her members had been called upon to meet, even "to the spoiling of their goods"; and when this was added to the bitter cup they had to drink,—the scanty fare, the insufficient clothing, the cares and anxieties of providing for their daily wants,—we can understand how much need there was for Divine support

and encouragement. It is not difficult to make a profession of religion when everything looks bright around us, when we have no worldly anxieties to encounter, and when life is flowing smoothly onwards; but this was not the condition in which the early Church was placed. Persecution seemed the rule, and the calm enjoyment of Christian liberty the exception; so that St. Paul has laid it down even as a mark of faithfulness—"Yea, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12). It is hard to bear the shame which, to those who were once in comfortable circumstances, poverty brings with it—"the cruel scorn which virtue, sunk to poverty, will meet from giddy passion and low-minded pride"; and when we consider the circumstances of those who cast in their lot with Christ and His Apostles in the first ages of the Church, we cannot wonder at their deep poverty, nor can we be surprised if their persecutors would take advantage of it, in order the more effectually to crush them, if they failed in bringing them back either to Judaism or Paganism. St. James hints at one circumstance which would appear to bear upon this point—the distinctions observed in the synagogue between rich and poor—the one class having the chief seats, and the other relegated to some obscure corner, or made to sit beneath the footstool of the rich. There are distinctions in our social condition, and there will be such until the end; nor are these contrary to the ordinance of God, but in exact harmony with it. We are commanded to render to all their due; "tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom is due, honour to whom honour" (Rom. xiii. 7). And we may suppose that there are differences in the hierarchy of heaven, for we read of "thrones, and dominions, principalities, and powers." Indeed, if order is Heaven's first law, variety is the second—and, regarding this arrangement, we can only say, "Even so, Father, for thus it seemeth good in Thy sight." But, in the Church of God,

these preferences should not be observed. Here rich and poor meet together, the Lord, the Maker of all. We should see no difference between man and man in the order of Christian brotherhood—at Holy Communion—or in the assemblies for public worship; as the Church below should be a representation of the Church in heaven, where Lazarus is found in Abraham's bosom, and where the dying malefactor finds a place with Christ in Paradise. In the Church at Smyrna, those Christians who were in deep poverty may have had, in public assemblies, to bear the insults and scoffs of the wealthy, such as are referred to by St. James (ii. 3), where he speaks of partiality in regard to personal distinctions in places of religious worship (*συναγωγαί*), and which partiality he condemns as inconsistent with all true charity, opposed to Christian brotherhood, and dishonouring to Christ. The name *Ebionite* was given to the first Christians in derision, for this name implies their great poverty. Their poverty aggravated their sufferings; but He who was rich and for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich, told them—though He knew their poverty, yet they were rich. This paradox can only be explained as regards their possessing the true riches—they were rich in faith and good works. They were rich in that sense in which the Apostles were "poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." There is a wealth which in God's sight is poverty, and there is a poverty which is in His sight inestimable riches. It is not uncommon to find men laying up treasure for themselves, and not being rich towards God; and what will that treasure profit? It will perish in the using—it will never satisfy the soul. It will not smooth life's rough way, nor remove the thorn from the brow of care; it will not heal the broken heart nor strengthen the spirit for its flight to the unseen world. The riches which God recognises, and which are in His sight of inestimable value, are the riches

of goodness, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the riches of grace, the riches of glory, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, the unsearchable riches of Christ. A different standard is this from what the world counts riches, and one which has its practical application in the Holy Home of Nazareth. The Church in Smyrna was in this respect like the Church of the Apostles. "Silver and gold it had none"; but it had what was infinitely better—it had faith and fortitude, enabling it to look beyond the trials and troubles of life, to that world where faith shall be exchanged for vision, and hope merge into everlasting joy; and her children gloried in their tribulations, feeling that they were only the winds sent from a loving Father to waft them the more speedily across the sea of time. Tribulation to a Christian is quite different from what it is to a worldling—to the one it is paternal, to the other it is penal—to the one it is the chastisement of sons whom God is preparing for a throne; to the other it is the infliction of the sentence of a judge upon a criminal. "If we are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers," we are not sons, "for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. xii. 7, 8). In the sunshine of prosperity we see least of God; it is only when night comes, and heaven is lighted with its myriad lamps, that we can fully trace His handiwork—and so as regards the Church's tribulation:

> "Then sorrow touched by Thee grows bright,
> With more than rapture's ray;
> As darkness shows us worlds of light,
> We never saw by day."

καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων, κ.τ.λ., *and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but a synagogue of Satan.* The preposition ἐκ here inserted gives the idea that the "blasphemy" alluded to had been directed against the suffering Church, and had been endured

by it. It was not blasphemy directly against God, so much as reviling and pouring contempt and scorn upon the Christians of Smyrna. The hatred of the Jews against the followers of Christ was bitter in the extreme, and every epithet of the coarsest character was pitilessly directed against them. In Judea the Jews were the sole persecutors of the Christians, and although their political power did not reach beyond the bounds of Palestine, yet, whenever they were able, they instigated the heathen to persecute them; nor were they in the least scrupulous as to the means which were used, provided the end was obtained. They effected the Crucifixion of our Lord by representing Him to be a rival of Cæsar, and they stirred up the heathen through the extent of the Roman Empire to oppress and persecute the Christians on the ground that the Gospel which they held and taught, inculcated disloyalty to Cæsar.

St. Paul's sufferings, through the hostility of the Jews, are frequently mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles—at Antioch in Pisidia, at Iconium, at Lystra, at Thessalonica, at Berea, at Ephesus (Acts xiii.–xix.). Now the question in this place which we have to deal with is: Who are those named by the term "Jews"? Are they unbelieving Jews, or are we to regard them as Judaizing Christians,—Jews who had some kind of faith in Christ, yet who retained all the enmity and bitterness of their original Pharisaism? Was the Church at Smyrna suffering from a Judaizing party within, who were flinging reproach and calumny upon the followers of Christ, or from unconverted, hostile, and avowed Jews without? It is more natural to adopt the latter interpretation. Judaizing Christians might give considerable trouble, as we find they did to the Galatian Church, but we do not find their opposition amounting to pains and penalties, such as were inflicted upon the Church at Smyrna. The Jews were much more violent in their opposition to, and persecution of, the Christ-

ians than were the heathen. The latter were only roused into active antagonism spasmodically. At times, under such Emperors as Nerva and Antoninus Pius, the Christians enjoyed immunity from open hostility, and it was only when circumstances arose to turn special attention to them for some alleged breach of duty, or some political delinquency, which generally the jealousy and enmity of the Jews originated, that the Roman power directed its strong arm against them.

These Jews professed to be attached to the Mosaic ritual, to be the natural seed of Abraham, and probably the spiritual descendants too; they regarded themselves as the favourites of heaven, and the children of the promise, and they hated the followers of Christ with a rancour and malignity of the fiercest character. Their fathers blasphemed Jesus of Nazareth and crucified Him, and cried, "His blood be upon us and on our children"; and in every age since they uttered that fearful imprecation, the Jewish race have been crucifying Him afresh and putting Him to an open shame. They cried out for His condemnation, when the heathen governor was disposed to set Him free. They stoned the martyr Stephen, "calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." At Antioch, "when they saw the multitudes assembled to hear the Word of God, they were filled with envy, and spake against the things that were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming." They stirred up the devout and honourable women of the same city, and raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts; and so here the Jews were the most determined enemies of the Church at Smyrna. And thus, instead of being acknowledged as the chosen people of God, the natural seed of Abraham,—instead of being regarded with favour as holding the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses, they are not worthy

of the name of Jews, they are pseudo-members of the synagogue, and are "a synagogue of Satan." Their spirit was that of Satan, under whose influence they appear to have been acting, and they had no claim to be recognised as members of the true Church of God.

In the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, which Eusebius has carefully recorded, and which contains an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, one cannot fail to notice the malignity which the Jews exhibited in effecting that martyrdom. When the Roman proconsul had found it impossible to terrify the aged bishop, either by threats of exposure to the lions, or death by fire, and was so embarrassed when he saw the calmness and confidence of the martyr, that he did not well know how to act, the multitude of Gentiles and Jews who dwelt at Smyrna, with insatiate rage shouted aloud,—"This is the doctor of Asia, the father of Christians, the subverter of our gods, who hath taught many not to sacrifice nor to adore. Let the lions loose against Polycarp!" When this was refused, they then unanimously shouted, "Let him be burnt alive!" We are told this business was executed with all possible speed; and that the Jews distinguished themselves, with their usual malice, by gathering, from the workshops and baths, fuel for this purpose; and after the body was consumed, their malevolence was so extreme, that they endeavoured to prevent the friends of the martyr from gathering up his bones for burial, on pretence that the Christians of Smyrna would "leave the Crucified One, and begin to worship him." Well may it be said they were not *Jews*, for that name is derived from הוֹדָה (*praise*), and a Jew is one who praises the true God and acknowledges Him. The true Jew is he who is not one outwardly, but who is one inwardly, who is circumcised in heart and spirit, not in the letter—whose *praise* is not of men but of God (Rom. ii. 29)—one who owns Christ as the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecy, and submits himself to Him. All

others are spurious, because they reject the testimony which God has given of His Son.

ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, *but a synagogue of Satan.* The word, synagogue, does not apply in the New Testament to a place of Christian worship; except in one or two instances where it is used by Jewish Christians. There is in James ii. 2, the word συναγωγὴν, translated "assembly," and which the Revised New Testament has rendered *synagogue* in the text, and *assembly* in the margin; but the term is used here, by way of adaptation, to denote a place of assembly which was to the Christians what the synagogue was to the Jews. Some have thought that the word here strictly refers to the Jewish synagogues, because at Jerusalem there were many such, and the Jewish Christians had not wholly severed their connection with the synagogue, but were in a kind of transition state. It is true that Ignatius, in his Epistle to Polycarp, makes use of the term to denote a place of Christian worship, when he says, "Let assemblies (συναγωγαὶ) be more frequent"; but, in the New Testament, the word Church (ἐκκλησία) is almost invariably used as descriptive of the place of Christian worship. This word, συναγωγὴ, is a further proof that it is of Jews properly so called, and not of Christianized Jews, the expression "a synagogue of Satan," is intended. The spirit of Satan was working in them,—the spirit of scorn, pride, contempt, cruelty, and malicious wickedness. They were worse than the heathen, for they had, by their bitter hostility to Christ and the followers of Christ, shown that they were anti-Christian. Had they been the true sons of Abraham, they would have believed in the God of Abraham and Abraham's Saviour, for Abraham desired earnestly to see the day of Christ, and he saw it and was glad (John viii. 56). Though they worshipped in a synagogue, and professed to belong to the true God, yet they were unworthy of the name Jews, and

the service in which they engaged more properly belonged to the Prince of Darkness, than the living and true God. It is sad to reflect how much Christianity has had to endure from its enemies, and how great have been the efforts made to crush it. The Church may well adopt the words of the Psalmist and say, "Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour; mine adversaries are all before Thee." All opposition to the spread of Christianity seems only to have concentrated the energies of its friends, and to have given them fresh power in their onslaughts against the strongholds of Satan; and the weapons of scorn, ridicule, and reproach used by its adversaries, have recoiled, and smitten with confusion and dismay those who had recourse to them. Both as regards the confessor before his judge, and the martyr at the stake, the secret of their strength lay in this—"The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge."

Ver. 10. *Μὴ φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν· ἰδοὺ δὴ μέλλει βαλεῖν ὁ Διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε· καὶ ἕξετε θλῖψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. Γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer; behold, already the Devil is about to cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.* The Church at Smyrna had undergone severe suffering, yet her trials were not ended, and to prepare the faithful followers of Christ for the storm that was impending, He exhorts them not to be discouraged, as they should not be left alone in their sufferings. Some might have said—"Sorrow ends not when it seemeth done;" and the thought of its return would only add to its depth, as there would be a double load to be sustained,—one part by anticipation of coming evil, the other by enduring it when it came. But our blessed Lord would bear the burdens of His

people. He would not leave them under the impression that the path to heaven was easy, and that there were no dangers to be met. He would show them, as He did His disciples, that, as He was, so should they be in the world—that the servant was not greater than his master, nor the disciple above his Lord—that if they had persecuted Him, they would also persecute His followers. To St. Paul, after he had that wonderful vision on his way to Damascus, there was made known what his course in this life should be,—"For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts ix. 16). He would have him count the cost before he set out on the enterprise, and not have it said, "This man began to build, but was not able to finish." The Christian warfare is not to be abandoned when we are once engaged in it. The command is, like that given to Moses at the Red Sea, "Go forward!" A half-hearted Christianity will never carry any one to heaven; nor will a religion which is not based upon sound principles stand the fiery trial which will try every man's work. Principles are to character what the root is to the tree. If there are large boughs and feeble roots, it will not stand the storm; nor will the Christian professor, unless he is rooted, and grounded, and settled on Christ. Like the Apostle of the Gentiles, amid bonds, and imprisonments, and persecutions, he who is so established, will be enabled to say, "Yet none of these things move me" (Acts xx. 24). On the contrary, knowing in whom he has believed, he can "glory in tribulations also," happier in enduring afflictions for Christ, than Cæsar seated on the throne of the world.

Μὴ φοβοῦ, Fear not! How often our blessed Lord thus comforted His weak and faltering disciples. These words spoke of "the calm, the stilly hour, when storms were gone." They came like balm to troubled spirits, or as celestial chimes from the upper sanctuary, telling of the eternal joy and rest

of heaven. Suffering Church in Smyrna, fear not. My grace is sufficient for you, and My strength is made perfect in weakness. Beaten down with a great fight of afflictions, your earthly blessings dissipated like chaff before the whirlwind—"fear not." When flesh and heart fail, God will be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever. You who through fear of death were all your lifetime subject to bondage, fear not. Christ has driven the last enemy from the field. He has passed through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection; and He has this message for His followers: "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction!" Fear not bonds. Prison walls cannot shut out Christ. Fear not poverty, for Christ can make you rich. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Every one of that multitude in heaven who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, has come out of the great tribulation. Their life has been a daily conflict, and through Him who is the Captain of their salvation, they have been more than conquerors.[1]

ἰδοὺ δὴ μέλλει, κ.τ.λ., behold already the Devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried. The word *δὴ, already*, Wordsworth has retained which, although it is not in the "Textus receptus," is in the Vatican MS., and has been restored by Tischendorf. It has been omitted by the Revisers, yet from the fact of its having a place in three of the oldest MSS., and from the manner in which it connects the persecution that follows with the preceding clause which speaks of sufferings that were impending, it is not an unimportant particle. It intimates that the storm was close at hand, and that there was the more need for preparation to meet it. The work of imprisonment and death is here assigned to the Devil, not his instruments. It was not merely because the Jews and heathen found their systems

[1] Compare Rev. i. 17.

of religion overthrown by the power of the Gospel, or their worldly interests interfered with, as in the case of Demetrius and Alexander at Ephesus, that the Christians of Smyrna were persecuted to bonds, imprisonment, and death; but it was owing to the direct agency of Satan acting upon the unregenerate heart. The work is here attributed to the personal agency of the Devil. It is quite common in the present day to find men denying the existence of Satan, and speaking of the expressions denoting personal intelligence and will, as applied to him, as only another name for an abstract evil principle. Like the Manicheans, possibly they would make good and evil coeval, if they would admit of any distinction between them. Evil was in matter, the Manicheans thought, and good was in spirit, and hence they had recourse to several devices for keeping the material part of man in subjection. But it is singular that it never struck those philosophical enthusiasts that pride and envy, two of the most virulent and deadly sins that man is capable of, have no connection with matter whatsoever. As to the personality of Satan, it is clearly brought before us in this passage. If amongst holy angels we may conceive of a hierarchy represented by "thrones and dominions, principalities and powers," there is no reason why we may not believe in the existence of a hierarchy of evil spirits, with Satan at their head. We have a natural bias to evil, but if there was no living personal intelligence to give an impetus to it, its range would be limited, and its power would be ineffectual. If we had only an abstract evil principle to deal with, the capability of resisting and overcoming it would be brought within a possible range; and if there was only an abstract good principle, and not a living personal intelligence in whom goodness was a leading attribute—indeed whose nature was goodness,—can we suppose that that abstraction would have such overwhelming power as to lead men so much to appreciate and

follow after goodness? Read the account of the temptation in the garden, the trials of Job, or the numbering of the people by David, and in each case we must be convinced of a concrete powerful intelligence prompting to evil. What did our Lord mean when He used such expressions as the following: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"; "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"; "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me"? What is meant by the wiles of Satan, the devices of Satan, the snares of Satan? All these expressions and allusions indicate clearly that the Scripture takes cognisance of a personal spiritual adversary which, in the battle of life, we have to meet, and against whom we should have little hope of success, had we not One who for us has gained the victory over him. And the words of our Lord in the message to the Church at Smyrna fully recognise one whom He names ὁ *Διάβολος*, the *Slanderer*, or accuser, who was then at work rousing the fierce passions of the Jews, and instigating the heathen to persecute to the death those who were named by the Christian name—the poor but devoted followers of Christ at Smyrna. This passage is referred to in the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna written after the martyrdom of Polycarp; and the wicked instruments who carried out that infamous crime are spoken of as being under the influence of Satan: "Much did Satan contrive against them (the Christians); but, thanks to God, did not prevail against them all."

The Devil was then about to cast some of them into prison, and after suffering torture there, they were to emerge from it only to meet death in its worst and most terrible forms.

ἵνα πειρασθῆτε, *that ye may be tried.* The Devil's casting them into prison was in order that they might go back unto perdition; that they might fall into his snare and be led

captive by him at his will; but the Christians at Smyrna were not to be so drawn aside from their faithfulness to Christ, and what the Devil designed as the means of their destruction would only be the means of their greater steadfastness in Christ's cause, and greater zeal for His glory. Like gold tried by the fire, so should their faith be "found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 7). The temptation of Satan was to solicit to sin, but God overruled it so that it was a test, or proof, of the power of religion in the souls of the faithful. This temptation from the Devil was evidently what was to be added to the bitter cup of suffering of the Smyrnean Church. All temptations which proceed from sinful motives, and with a view to an evil end, are from the Devil. When God sends temptations, they are those of a Father's hand to try and prove His people, and produce in them more and more the fruits of righteousness. In Ecclesiasticus xv. 11, 12, 20, it is said, "Say not thou, It is through the Lord that I fell away: for thou oughtest not to do the things that He hateth: say not thou, He hath caused me to err. . . . He hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath He given any man licence to sin."

And St. James says: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man." Although we read, "God did tempt Abraham," it was not to entice him to sin; it was with a good motive, and for a good end. He tried him, to bring out more prominently that faith, and that obedience, for which he is extolled, and of which he is, and shall be, a noble exemplar to the end of time. Tertullian, writing on this passage, says: "God forbid that we should imagine that He tempts any one, as if He were ignorant of any man's faith, or desired to make any one fall. No; such ignorance and malice belong not to God but to the Devil. Abraham

was commanded to slay his son, not for his temptation, but for the manifestation of his faith as a pattern and proof to all that no pledges of love, however dear, are to be preferred to God."[1] But what could be the object of the Devil casting some of the Smyrnean Christians into prison? If with the object of tempting them, could the temptation not have been as readily and successfully effected under ordinary circumstances? There is something specific in this statement. He would do in prison what he could not do with the same degree of success out of it. When thrown into prison, and there subject to torture and the scourge, they would be more likely to succumb to the demands of their heathen persecutors. Both in the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, and in that of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, we have accounts of terrible sufferings which the Christians had to undergo in prison at the hands of their bitter foes. In the latter Epistle we are told that the Devil was driven to new resources of torment, so that "Christians were thrust into the darkest and most noisome parts of the prison; their feet were distended in a wooden trunk, even to the fifth hole, and in this situation they suffered all the indignities which diabolical malice could inflict. Hence many of them were suffocated in prison, whom the Lord, showing forth His own glory, was pleased thus to take to Himself. The rest, though afflicted to such a degree as to seem scarce capable of recovery under the kindest treatment, destitute as they were of all help and support, yet remained alive, strengthened by the Lord, and confirmed both in body and mind, and these encouraged and comforted the rest." The details are most harrowing, and such as could only have been prompted by the malignant cruelty of the Spirit of all Evil. It was natural to expect that some would relapse under such a terrible ordeal; but there were many

[1] Tertull., *de Orat.*, c. 8.

who, amid the most excruciating agonies, remained faithful, thinking not their lives dear unto themselves that they might finish their course with joy, and testify to the world the power of that grace which enabled them to triumph over the malice of the Wicked One.

καὶ ἕξετε θλῖψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα, *and ye shall have tribulation ten days.* Considerable difference of opinion is held as to the time here specified. Some interpret the ten days on the year-day theory, and make them to mean *ten years.* The passages on which this theory is founded are Num. xiv. 34; Ezek. iv. 6; Dan. xii. 11. They who adopt this view allege that the ten years' θλῖψις was during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian, the last of the persecutors of the Church of God, previous to the time of Constantine. We are quite willing to believe that, under Diocletian, the Asiatic Churches suffered severely, and their period of suffering may have lasted about the term specified. But it is scarcely allowable to apply the ten days' tribulation mentioned in this verse to a period so remote, especially as the previous portion of the passage speaks of immediate suffering. Besides, this tribulation is predicable only of the Church at Smyrna, and must have had its fulfilment in connexion with that Church. There are some who interpret this passage of the ten persecutions, beginning with Nero, and ending with Diocletian, which for upwards of three hundred years the Church had to endure; but surely this is a fanciful view and one that has nothing to sustain it in the words in question. The period, *ten days*, indicates rather a short season of tribulation than a protracted one, and there is no reason to interpret it differently from its plain and obvious meaning, especially as it occurs in epistolary writing, and in reference to historic facts which transpired in connexion with the Church addressed. The shortness of the time is given as a reason why the Church should be faithful, and endure her

trials patiently: "Heaviness might endure for a night, but joy should come in the morning." This motive for calm endurance is expressed by St. Peter, in his Epistle addressed to "the strangers" scattered through lesser Asia, during the persecution raised by Nero. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (1 Pet. i. 6). And why may we not look for the prediction having its fulfilment in regard to the Church at Smyrna? We are told that persecutions broke out at fixed intervals, or on special occasions, such as the celebration of the heathen games, when large crowds were gathered together, and when some supposed slight may have been the originating cause, or when some false report may have reached the ears of those in authority.

Why may we not consider the ten days' tribulation to have been fulfilled at the time Polycarp suffered martyrdom, as the persecution in which he was a martyr lasted considerably beyond the days appointed for the games, and may have literally been ten days in duration? At all events, the whole spirit and scope of the passage is to give us the idea of a brief period of tribulation, and thus to afford comfort and encouragement to the faithful in the Church at Smyrna.[1]

Γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, κ.τ.λ., Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. These words contain a solemn charge, and a glorious promise. They read as if the faithfulness spoken of was meant to apply to the whole life of the Christian; but this is not its meaning here, although it is true that it is only they who endure to the end who shall be saved. The exhortation or charge does not

[1] Dean Plumptre takes quite a different view of this passage. He considers the number *ten* as symbolic, being the last of the scale of numbers, the total of the first four units, each of which has a mystic meaning of its own. Here he regards it as the representation of completeness, and therefore of persecution carried to its fullest extent, and lacking nothing that could make it thorough and perfect as a test. This interpretation, he tells us, is based upon Bähr, *Symbolik*, ii. 2, § 8.

contemplate any portion of time whatever; it rather speaks of the degree of suffering to be undergone. Do not falter under any kind of persecution, whether it be torture, or bonds, or imprisonment, or even death. Whatever may be the nature of the persecution you may have to endure—whatever may be its severity—even though you should be called upon to exchange your natural life for the martyr's crown, *be faithful.* Do not flinch in view of the tortures of the heathen persecutors, as some have done. We read of Quintus, mentioned in the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, who trembled when he saw the wild beasts, and who was induced by the proconsul to swear by Cæsar, and renounce Christ. Like St. Peter, he had been self-confident and boastful, and, when his courage was put to the test, he basely denied his Master. What is faithfulness? It is allegiance to Christ; it is the due performance of a trust committed to us as stewards; it is the constant and persevering progress in the path of duty. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing" (Matt. xxiv. 45). If we are the faithful servants of Christ, we shall find Him a good Master, not requiring us to reap where we did not sow, or gather where we had not strawed; but we must not presume upon His goodness by neglecting to discharge the duties connected with the trust committed to us. We may not be selfish, apathetic, indifferent, but energetic and active in His service. We may not choose present ease and comfort, and enjoyment, in preference to self-denying activities and the enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Lot did so, and the penalty came with terrible power. If Christians at all, we should concentrate our energies on our Christian calling. See with what purpose and singleness of aim men in every

pursuit in life follow out the objects of their choice, how united they are, all minor differences set aside, and no pains considered too great, so as to reach the goal of worldly ambition.

Can we see such faithfulness, zeal, and devotedness, in the service of our blessed Lord and Master? Why are we not as earnest for the world to come as the world we are leaving? The children of this world rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, that they may secure the ends which they have contemplated: how much more we who have become enrolled Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end. We must be faithful to Christ. We have enlisted in His service, and His mark is on our forehead. We must therefore be jealous for His honour, earnest in His cause, and true to His standard. We must not be ashamed to confess Him before men, or to own Him as our Lord. We must be faithful to the truth. Whether it brings with it strife or division—whether its profession is attended with risk to our present peace, as it was to Daniel amid the beast-worshippers of Babylon, or whether we may be called upon to suffer because of our firm adherence to it, as did the Three Children who would not bow before Nebuchadnezzar's image, we must hold it dear as life. That mistaken notion that it matters little what a man believes, provided his life be right, has no place in that Truth. Are people to suppose they are less responsible to God for the use they make of their mental and spiritual faculties, than for their actions? Is reason not God's gift? Is not conscience the eye He has placed in the soul? Are understanding, memory, will, not to be exercised in a right direction? Is unregulated desire not to be brought under proper control; nay, is not every thought to be brought into obedience to Christ? If the springs of action are impure, so will the life be; and if the heart is right with God, the life will also be right. A right faith, and a right

life, may always be regarded as having a close affinity and a mutual concord, and against their divorce it may well be said, —"Quis separabit"? We should be faithful to the distinctive teachings of our Church. Dogmatic definition is thought by some to possess too stringent properties, and to be adverse to the spirit of Christian liberty. But if we are to have no symbols of faith, no creeds, no formulæ, the condition of religion would be somewhat like the state of the Jewish commonwealth in the time of the Judges, when every one seemed to do what was right in his own eyes, there being no king in Israel. Take away law from society, and it is no better than a rope of sand; and take away forms of faith, and the Church must fall to pieces, because there is no bond of union left by which its maintenance may be secured. We must also be faithful in Christian duty. Religion is a system of doctrines to be believed, and it is not less a system of duties to be practised. "If ye know these things," said Christ, "happy are ye if ye do them." The Gospel does not free us from its obligations. It is not enough for a man to say he has faith: he must show it by his works. The Gnostics taught the bare knowledge of Christ was all that was necessary, and if a man possessed this knowledge, it was a matter of indifference what his life was. This shocking Antinomian heresy, while it perverted the truth, produced results of the most lamentable character in the lives of its professors. If one says, I am no longer to yield obedience to the law as a rule of life, I am free to act as I please, it is obvious that a very questionable morality must proceed from such abnegation of all law, and instead of being faithful in duty, we may look for consequences which will be fatal to Christianity. This charge, "Be faithful unto death," is one given only to Christ's freemen. Those who are neither His soldiers nor servants will refuse to bear Christ's yoke, and to submit to Him. Like Gallio, they will care for none

of these things, and to them this exhortation can have no application. On the other hand, the faithful servant will always consider that he can never do enough for Christ, and he will bring his best and choicest gifts, and lay them at his Master's feet with a devotion similar to that which prompted the star-conducted sages to present their gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Like Ruth to Naomi, there will be a fixed determination that nought but death can sever; or like the Patriarch of Uz, the faithful servant will ever be ready to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

There are faithless ones now, as there have ever been, who are feeble in the day of conflict, and who are like the disciples when their Master was delivered up to be crucified, of whom it is said—"All forsook Him." To those who thus turn back in the day of battle, life can never be happy. Conscience will at times be their accuser, and the thought will force itself involuntarily on the mind—Oh, that I had never known the way of righteousness, rather than having known it, to turn away from it! For such there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. They have vilely thrown their shield away in the presence of the enemy, and have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. What good to such was the profession of Christianity, when they did not hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end?

Let these words, "Faithful unto death," be written not merely "with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond," on the inner chambers of our dwellings, but let them be indelibly engraven on the fleshy tables of our hearts, that they may never pass from our memories while the day of trial lasts. Let them be handed down from parent to child as a cherished tradition, all the more dear because of the successive generations that made them the watchword of life, and let them be a stimulus to duty through ages yet to come; for their virtue and power cannot be impaired

by the lapse of time. Let them never be forgotten by the Church of Christ in its continued conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil: let there never be any compromise with error, any surrender of the truth, any relaxing of religious principle; but with faith and patience, and earnest and unwearied self-denial, let all her members adopt these words as their daily motto; and in life's closing hour, they shall be enabled to say, "When flesh and heart fail, Thou, O God, art the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."

καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς, and I will give thee the crown of life. As to the conqueror in the Olympic and other ancient games, so the promise to the faithful follower of Christ is *τὸν στέφανον*. The word is distinct from *διάδημα*; the one indicating the crown of the conqueror (*στέφανος*) as distinguished from the crown of the emperor (*διάδημα*). In 2 Tim. ii. 5, the words, *he is not crowned* are *οὐ στεφανοῦται*. In 2 Tim. iv. 8, the crown promised to St. Paul is *ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος*. In St. James i. 12, it is *τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς*. In 1 Pet. v. 4, the crown described is *τῆς δόξης στέφανον*. In all these passages it is *στέφανος* that is used; and the idea seems to be that as the racer, or athlete, who had been successful in these games, was crowned at the end of the struggle with a chaplet of pine leaves, parsley, or wild olive, so the crown of immortality will be awarded by Christ to all who have been found faithful. It is a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, a crown of glory, expressions denoting its incomparable value. It is a prize which is above all price; it is not merely the life of the soul that is promised, but resurrection life. The competitor in the ancient games ran, or strove, to obtain a corruptible crown; we an incorruptible. It is sad to reflect how comparatively few there are who are really striving in the Christian course; and the reason is that they undervalue, and do not rightly appreciate,

the prize that is before them, because they are ignorant of the hope of their calling, and of the glory of the saint's inheritance. If we could only keep our eyes upon that inheritance — if we could think of angels' society, and angels' blessedness, heaven's purity, and heaven's peace, our Father's service, and the Redeemer's love, there are few trials here which we would not willingly bear in the prospect of those bright enjoyments, and more especially when we know that the more severe the trial, the brighter will be the crown. And are there not many encouragements to make us persevere in our course, and manfully struggle for the victory? The eyes of God are upon us—the eyes of Christ are directed towards us with sympathy and sweetness in their glance. The eyes of holy angels are upon us, watching for opportunities to strengthen us by their invisible aids, wherewith both by day and night they minister to them who are heirs of salvation. The eyes too of glorified spirits are upon us—we are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. xii. 1). They were once as we now are; the grace which saved them is sufficient for us. Faint not, then, in the course. Tire not in the exercise of the strife. It is only he who endures to the end who shall be the recipient of the crown. Vigour and alacrity in youth, noble self-sacrifice in manhood, the longest running and the best running will be of no use, if we suffer any influence, such as that which drove back the Galatian Church, to impede our progress. It has been disputed whether the crown here referred to is the diadem of royalty, or the garland of victory. Archbishop Trench inclines to the opinion that it is the former that is spoken of. At the same time he admits that στέφανος is seldom used in this sense. The word is derived from στέφω, *to encircle*, and, in the passive voice, to be crowned, wreathed, garlanded; and this word points directly to the usages of the games. When the victor was wreathed it was with leaves

—with κότινος (wild olive) at the Olympic, δάφνη (laurel) at the Pythian, σέλινον (parsley) at the Nemean, and κισσὸς (ivy) at the Isthmian. Throughout the New Testament, where the crown of the conqueror is alluded to, it is always expressed by the word στέφανος, excepting in reference to the crowns of the dragon (Rev. xii. 3), of the Apocalyptic Beast (Rev. xiii. 1), where the word, διαδήματα, is used, and in Rev. xix. 12, where the same word is found expressing the Royalty of Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. At the opening of the first seal (Rev. vi. 2), Christ is introduced as wearing a crown of victory (στέφανος), for He goes forth conquering and to conquer; but when He is seated on the throne of the universe, crowned Universal King, the kingdoms of this world having become those of Christ, he wears the διάδημα. It is hardly an argument in proof of the στέφανος of the passage before us being understood of a royal crown, to say that this word is used to denote the crown of thorns which our Lord wore; for surely the crown of thorns was as much an investiture in token of the victor's triumph, as that of mock royalty. It has been objected that the Asiatic Churches were not familiar with the games, and that it would therefore have no meaning to them if the term was used to denote anything but royalty; but surely the people of Smyrna were familiar with the *Dionysian* "*Mysteries*," as they were called, and in those games the victor, as in the games celebrated in Greece, received a crown or garland as a badge of triumph. If those Churches were planted by St. Paul, there could be no difficulty on the part of the persons addressed understanding the allusion to the conqueror in the games, for no doubt St. Paul would instruct them in the imagery by which he designed to enforce and apply spiritual truth; and as in Corinth he alluded to the Isthmian games, so in Smyrna, he would take advantage of the *Dionysia* to tell them of the Christian conquest, and the Christian's crown;

and if our Lord intended in His address to the Church at Smyrna to have conveyed to it that those who were faithful unto death should have a crown of royalty, He would have used the word *διάδημα*, instead of *στέφανος*; and therefore we are to take the word chosen to express the honour conferred on the successful combatant in the battle of life, in its natural and obvious signification.

In the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, there is an allusion to this very passage. Speaking of the martyrdom of Polycarp, we are told, "Polycarp by his patience overcame the unrighteous ruler, and received the crown of immortality." This shows that the Smyrnean Church not only understood this passage, but took it as indicating that the crown bestowed, like that in the games, was given as a badge of conquest, and not as an emblem of royalty. The crown of the Christian will be like that which Jesus now wears. "Such honour have all the saints." What are all our earthly tribulations when compared with the glory that shall be revealed? How dim the lustre of every worldly crown when viewed in the dazzling light of the glory that excelleth! Those faithful followers of Christ in Smyrna may have had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; yea they may have had, many of them, to seek a refuge in the deserts and in dens and caves of the earth, but here their afflictions end; and happiness, and calm, and peace, are the martyr's heritage after the victory is won, as the crown of immortality will be the unfading emblem of his glory and honour in that "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Ver. 11. *Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις*: *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.* These words have been already noticed in the exposition of verse 7. The same formula

enforcing attention, is attached to each message, and intimates that the address to each individual Church is to be heard, and listened to, by all with due consideration and respect.

ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῇ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου, *he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.* "The second death!" This expression we meet nowhere but in the Revelation. Here it is the peculiar privilege of those who triumph in Christ that they shall be exempt from the sufferings attached to the second death. In Rev. xx. 6, those who shall partake of the first resurrection shall have the immunity of escaping the power of the second death. And if we would inquire as to the nature of that second death, we are told in Rev. xx. 14, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." And if we would further desire to know upon whom this second death would come with all its terrible power, in Rev. xxi. 8, we read, "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Although our Lord in His teaching did not in express words make use of this awful phrase, yet it is by implication necessarily contained in several places where His sayings regarding the conditions of a future life are recorded. He speaks of the Gehenna of fire (Matt. v. 22); of fearing Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. x. 28); of His sending forth His angels, and their gathering out of His kingdom them that do iniquity, and casting them into the furnace of fire (Matt. xiii. 41, 42); of the judgment of hell (Matt. xxiii. 33); and of those on His left hand going away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into eternal life (Matt. xxv. 46). In all these passages it is implied that there is a death which is to be feared beyond the mere death

of the body. As the life of the body was not the only or true life of the faithful, so the death of the body was not all that the wicked should be subject to, but a death more to be dreaded—that which is here designated "the second death." The second death is equivalent to Hell, the final abode of the lost—"the lake of fire" of Rev. xx. 14; and that death, whatever it may be, will be one of enduring punishment. The eternity, or non-eternity, of future punishment is a question much agitated just now. Some would try to show that the punishment will be only temporary, and that, after the wicked have undergone a penal and purifying process, they shall be saved. Others would like to regard the death of the wicked as annihilation, and ignore "the second death" altogether. Notwithstanding what has been said in support of these theories, the teaching of Holy Scripture leads to a different conclusion. In the face of such words as Matt. xxv. 46, where the eternity of the life of the righteous is placed in contrast with the eternity of the punishment of the wicked, it is impossible to explain away the obvious meaning of these teachings; and to limit in one clause of the verse what is without limit in the other is certainly a mode of exegesis which bids defiance to all correct rules of Scripture interpretation. To say, as some have alleged, that the word *αἰώνιος* does not necessarily imply unending duration, would only argue that the existence of God Himself was not eternal, for it is the same word which is used to express His eternity.[1] In Heb. ix. 14 we read, *διὰ Πνεύματος αἰωνίου, through the everlasting Spirit.* In Heb. i. 8, "Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, for ever and ever.*" In 1 Tim. i. 17, "Now unto the King eternal, *Τῷ δὲ Βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων*, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, for ever and ever.*"

[1] In Homer, *Iliad*, book i. line 290, the word used to denote the immortality of the gods is *αἰὲν ἐόντες*, always being.

Now if αἰώνιος in these places does not imply unlimited duration, surely words have lost their meaning. But it is said it is not compatible with God's justice to inflict everlasting punishment for finite transgressions. Here the sin of man is only for a life, at most of seventy or eighty years, and the punishment is out of all proportion to the sin. But we are very inadequate judges of the nature and consequences of sin; at least we are not unbiassed witnesses. We look upon it in a superficial aspect, but do we judge of it as God does? Sin is an evil of terrible magnitude. By the strength of the embankment, we may form an estimate of the power of the rushing tide which it has to stem; and by the infinite value of the Atonement provided to meet the malignant consequences of sin, we may form an estimate of the nature and extent of the effects of moral evil. What is evil? It is unregulated desire; it is the rejection by man of the law of his being; it is the concentration of desire upon some other being than God; it is the abuse of God's highest gift—man's free will—against God. Evil, as it presents itself here, is only the segment of a wider circle which has swept through all human history, and embraced within its range beings of higher intelligence than man. The consequences of that first sin by which the angels were condemned have never yet ceased, and never shall; and who shall dare to tell us that sin is a finite breach of a law which only demands a finite punishment? If so, why then did not a finite atonement suffice? Why could no less a sacrifice than that of God's eternal Son satisfy for man's transgression? The first sin in the garden of Eden might be supposed a little thing, and yet what have been its consequences? The partaking of—

> "the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden,"—

as Milton puts it, was no light matter; and we are therefore not to lay down our finite scale to measure magnitudes of the extent of which we have no conception.

It is said it would be utterly inconsistent with all we know, and can conceive, of the character of a loving and merciful God, to permit His creatures to languish in endless misery and suffering; and why should He not rather annihilate them, than perpetuate their existence in irremediable and interminable wretchedness? We might go farther by asking why did He who foresaw the end from the beginning, ever permit sin to mar His handiwork at all? and we can only answer by saying, He foresaw in the cure of evil a good which would more than compensate for the ravages effected by its introduction into the world—that, "as sin abounded, grace would much more abound." We have seen the existence of evil in the world for 6,000 years, but who will calculate as to the character of its effects; and surely if it has not been inconsistent with His love as the Moral Governor of the world to permit evil thus to be developed, with all its tale of unutterable suffering, how can it be inconsistent with His love to visit with eternal punishment those who repudiate the law of their being, and say in defiance of their Creator, "Who made Thee a Ruler and a Judge over us?"

When a man *dies*, by which expression we mean the separation of the soul from the body, are we to suppose the soul undergoes any change of character or disposition? Does the enmity of the creature against the Creator cease to exist—does the perverse will which has been in opposition to God's will, the unregulated desire which has been seeking another than the true centre of its being, become properly adjusted by that change? Assuredly not. "In the place where the tree falls, there it shall be" (Eccles. xi. 3). The direction and bias of the will at death become permanently fixed either towards the true Centre, God, or away from that Centre;

and in so far as probation is concerned for shaping the soul for eternity, that process is over. At the same time, in regard to the souls of the righteous, there may be moral progress and enlightenment in that state which intervenes between death and the resurrection, when in communion with Christ and the spirits of the just made perfect, knowledge will be increased, and the spirit, being delivered from the burden of the flesh, will be purified, and fitted for a higher and closer fellowship. But as to a probation for those who have died impenitent, or the possibility of altering their condition in the eternal world, there is not the shadow of a foundation for such a hope held out in Holy Scripture. The gulf is impassable; and there is no hope of reversing what man, by his own wilful disobedience, has effected. Eternal life is the prolongation of a spiritual life begun here, which will expand and be increasing in knowledge, in felicity, and love; and eternal death is the prolongation of a spiritual death actually begun here and perpetuated.

It is common to hear men talk of annihilation, as if that was the synonym of the second death; but, as has already been shown in the exposition of Rev. ii. 7, there is no such thing as annihilation. Matter is transformed, and, like Proteus, it changes its shape and substance; but it never ceases to exist. There is no annihilation of force. The sun's heat is now stored in the plant and in the tree, just as it is stored in the coal which we dig from the earth, and which is the conserved energy of the sun acting upon the vegetation of primæval times. Force has been transmuted, but it has never ceased to exist; so what has once been endowed with the gift of life can never perish. The personality is no way impaired by death. We see this distinctly in the case of the Spirit of our blessed Lord. We see it also in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. There was distinct individuality in both cases; and memory, consciousness, and will were still possessed by the

respective spirits of the departed. Indeed memory will be one of the bitter ingredients in the cup of the wicked: "Son, Remember!" If, at death, man was to be annihilated, surely there would be no meaning in the sacrifice of the Son of God, for it would be out of all proportion to the object attained. Besides, if God intended to strike out of existence any being ever created, why should He haveever brought such a being into existence at all, and subjected him to suffering, if such suffering be inconsistent with the attributes of a God of mercy? Of Judas, perhaps the greatest sinner who ever existed on this earth, it is said (Acts i. 25), that, after his dreadful death, "he went to his own place." There was no annihilation in his case. He went to a place of his own proper procurement. What then is meant by the punish- of the wicked, or the *second death?* If eternal life is the enjoyment of God's presence, the knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ through eternity, fulness of joy in His presence, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore; then eternal death must be the opposite—banishment from God, conscious separation from Him, and a dejection of spirit, under a sense of God's displeasure, memory filling the soul with remorse, "the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched."

Canon Cook, in the *Speaker's Commentary*, on the words "where their worm dieth not," thus writes: "Literally 'endeth not,' a fearful commentary on 'eternal' (αἰώνιος), making it equivalent to 'unending' (ἀτελεύτητος). The 'worm' represents the subjective anguish of remorse unending so long as memory remains, and is burdened with the consciousness of unpardonable sin. The fire is the action of Divine wrath: in fact the presence of God revealed, a 'consuming fire' to the lost." The words, "their worm," show that, as the punishment is eternal, so also they who suffer will exist for ever. In Matt. xxv. 41, the sentence of

the righteous Judge upon the wicked is recorded—"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." The happiness of the righteous is in verse 34, described as an inheritance—a kingdom prepared from the beginning for men; and if men forfeit their claim to it, the blame rests with themselves. The fire which shall be the portion of the reprobate is everlasting—the punishment is everlasting; then those who are to be punished must everlastingly subsist to endure the punishment, otherwise, there would be a punishment inflicted and none endured, which is a contradiction (*Pearson on Apostles' Creed*).

What the early Church taught on this very solemn subject we fully know, inasmuch as Origen wrote in defence of the non-eternity of future punishment, and was thoroughly refuted by St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, Lactantius, and others. The meaning of the word, *αἰώνιος*, is clearly laid down in the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, where speaking of the constancy of the martyrs enduring bodily tortures, the writer says: "And fastening their mind's eye on the grace of Christ, they despised worldly tortures, *through one hour* purchasing an exemption from the everlasting punishment (*διὰ μιᾶς ὥρας τὴν αἰώνιον κόλασιν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι*); and the fire inflicted upon them by their cruel tortures was to them cool; for they held before their eyes the escaping from the fire everlasting, and which is never quenched" (*πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν γὰρ εἶχον φυγεῖν τὸ αἰώνιον καὶ μηδέποτε σβεννύμενον πῦρ*).

It is a pleasant thing to the imagination to indulge in the thought of eternal hope—of a period when the punishment of the reprobate shall come to an end, and when, in the great restitution of all things, no place in God's universe will be found for the Devil and his angels; and if there was only any reasonable ground in Holy Scripture for such a conjecture, it would be calculated to give

sincere pleasure to every Christian heart. God is a God of love: He wills not the death of sinners, but rather that they should come to Him and be saved. But we must not forget that He is a God of justice too, and that where His love has failed to attract, His justice will fall with stern reality: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. iii 10, 11). These words stand as a protest against universal salvation, conditional immortality, and eternal hope. By the last expression is meant the hope that, after years of suffering and punishment for sin in the unseen world, the sinner shall ultimately be rescued from the gulf of black despair, and brought to glory. It would be a grand picture to look at, to see sin rolled away from creation, and the earth clothed in more perfect beauty than when it first came pure and spotless from the hands of its Almighty Creator. But when we search the Scriptures for proofs of this "fond desire, this pleasing hope," we fail to find them, and our earnest expectations melt away into thin air.

When the millennial age shall have passed, and when the general judgment shall have taken place, Death and Hades shall be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Into this shall those enumerated in Rev. xxi. 8, be also cast, and the sentence shall go forth, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." No silvery lining is thrown upon the dark cloud: all is left in the blackness of darkness for ever. What that lake of fire will be is veiled in obscurity. If figurative, it is designed to convey some deep and solemn reality that lies beneath the figure. The Gehenna, or Valley of Hinnom, was well known to the Jews as the place of Moloch worship which King Josiah defiled, and which afterwards was made the common

receptacle where the bodies of the worst criminals were thrown and left unburied, and where fires were lit to purify the contaminated air. It was a striking symbol of the lake of fire,—the second death. From the power of that second death the faithful martyrs and followers of Christ in Smyrna were to be freed; and not only they, but all His servants to the end of time, who will "fight the good fight of faith," shall be freed; for the Gospel excludes none from participating in the joys of heaven, but those who, by their own fault and deliberate choice, shut out themselves through rejecting the offer of grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. To such as wilfully and wantonly, openly and defiantly, despise the proffered mercy, "there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but," only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. x. 27). St. Augustine well says: "Vita damnatorum mors est." If the presence of God will be the happiness of the righteous, the exclusion from His presence and the glory of His power will be a portion of the privation of the wicked. If in His presence is life, utter alienation from Him is death; but the second death will not only involve the soul's banishment from God, but that of body and soul for ever. The kingdom of heaven is now opened to all believers. Over its high archway may be seen in letters of gold, so bright that he may run that readeth it: "By ME if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture."

Blessed Jesus, make us willing in this the day of Thy power!

III.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM.

12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·

13 Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου, καὶ ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ· καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου, καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αἷς Ἀντίπας ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

14 Ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαὰμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα, καὶ πορνεῦσαι.

15 Οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως.

16 Μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ, καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

17 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις· Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον, ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write; These things saith he that hath the sharp twoedged sword;

13 I know thy works and where thou dwellest, *namely* where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast my name, and thou didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas that faithful martyr of mine, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.

16 Repent, therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

III.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM.

Chap. ii. 12–18.

Pergamos, or more properly Pergamum, now called Bergama, was a very illustrious city of Asia Minor. It was the centre of a mighty empire founded nearly 300 years before the Christian era, and was governed by Eumenes, Attalus, Eumenes II., and Attalus Philadelphus, in succession.

Attalus Philomator, B.C. 133, made a bequest of it to Rome, because he had no children; but the Romans did not enjoy peaceable possession of it. It was in the province of Mysia, and situated on the banks of the river Caicus, about 60 miles N. of Smyrna, and nearly opposite the island of Lesbos. It is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, nor do we know anything regarding it in Christian times except what we gather from the Epistle addressed to the Church there. It was a great stronghold of idolatry, and is appropriately called "Satan's throne" (Rev. ii. 13). It was remarkable as a metropolis of paganism, for besides the temple of Æsculapius, the tutelary god, there were edifices raised in honour of the leading deities of the Greek mythology. Some traces are still to be seen of the walls and columns of what was once the temple of Æsculapius. Pergamum was the birthplace of Galen, the physician, and was described by Pliny as *longe clarissimum Asiæ Pergamum.* Its fame was high on account of the temple of the healing

god; but it was still greater on account of the Library founded by Eumenes II., who sought to rival the celebrated Alexandrian Library of the Ptolemies. This collection of literature and philosophy consisted of 200,000 volumes, and had been the work of the different kings of Pergamum. In connection with this library we get the name parchment —*Charta Pergamena*—because it was first invented and used at Pergamum for transcribing books, when Ptolemy, King of Egypt, prohibited the exportation of papyrus from his kingdom, jealous of his rival, Eumenes, having a library as valuable as his own. This noble collection was afterwards transported to Egypt by Cleopatra, where it enriched the Alexandrian library, till it was destroyed by the Saracens in A.D. 642. But it is not with its history when in its pagan state that we are chiefly concerned, although we must bear in mind there were certain circumstances connected with it in its pre-Christian character, which gave it a preponderance in deeds of darkness over the other cities which are grouped with it, and which render the designation, "Satan's throne," peculiarly applicable to it.

Ver. 12. *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν. And to the angel of the Church in Pergamum write; These things saith He that hath the sharp two-edged sword.* As in the Epistle to the Church at Ephesus, Christ, the High Priest who walks amid the seven golden candlesticks, presents Himself as the Searcher of hearts; and as in the address to the Church at Smyrna He introduces Himself as "the First and the Last," the Conqueror of Death, because imprisonment and death were impending over that Church; so here He presents Himself in a menacing attitude with a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth, the emblem of censure and punishment; because there was the temptation

to compromise religion, and tolerate iniquity, for the sake of some worldly advantage, and to withhold faithful testimony for Christ, through the fear of man which bringeth a snare. In the explanation of i. 16, allusion has been already made to the sharp sword with two edges, which St. John saw in his vision of the Son of man. We may, however, observe here that the particular attitude of Christ towards this Church was for a twofold object: (1) to promote the conviction and conversion of some; (2) to carry into effect the condemnation and punishment of others. We may take it that the two-edged sword is the Word of God, which St. Paul speaks of as "sharper than any two-edged sword." That sword is designed for a double purpose, either to smite *to heal*, by bringing conviction to the conscience—"piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit," and revealing to man the plague of his own heart; or to smite *to destroy*, as in Isa. xi. 4: "And He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." Those whom the Word does not convert, are condemned by it. Either the old nature is changed and renewed, or it is made more determined in its hostility against God. To them who believe He will speak peace; to those who are disobedient and rebellious He will come in swift destruction. He will whet His glittering sword, and cut off all evil doers from the city of His God. To His Church, Christ may be regarded as coming in His judicial capacity. He was coming to purge His floor—to cut off the dead branches—and even where Satan might be supposed to have erected his seat, to achieve successive victories.

Ver. 13. *Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου, καὶ ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ· καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου, καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αἷς Ἀντίπας ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.*

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest; namely, *where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast My name, and thou didst not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas that faithful martyr of Mine, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.* From the symbol of the sharp two-edged sword, we might naturally look for immediate judgment, yet the merciful Saviour proceeds to commend the good that was in the Church of Pergamum before He condemns the evil. Indeed, He would seem to give the Church credit for faith and constancy amid great temptation, and even allow a certain degree of palliation for the weakness of those who had been faithless, on account of the terrible power which they had to withstand. "I know where thou dwellest, *namely*, where Satan's throne is." Æsculapius, the healing god, was worshipped in the great temple built in his honour at Pergamum. The serpent, the symbol of Satan, was sacred to him. He was represented as having one hand resting on a serpent's head, and the other holding a staff, round which a serpent was entwined; and connected with that form of idol worship, a great medical school was established, of which Galen was the head. From the names given to Æsculapius, Σωτὴρ, Θεὸς Σωτὴρ, Pergameus Deus,[1] and from the prominent symbol of the wreathed serpent, which was the most conspicuous object in the great temple, there could hardly be any mistake on the part of Jews or Christians, in supposing that the Devil was worshipped under the serpent's form by the people of Pergamum, and therefore the term, "Satan's throne," might be appropriately applied to it.

But while idolatry is declared to be the work of Satan, it may also be conjectured that Satanic power was being exerted in other ways in Pergamum, instigating the heathen inhabitants to commit the most horrid crimes; for we read

[1] This title, Tacitus tells us, is found on many of the ancient coins of the kingdom. *Tacit. Annal.*, iii. 63.

of one who had been put to death in that city, and whom we may regard as the first to suffer martyrdom, as a faithful witness for the truth, amongst the Christian professors in the Asiatic Churches.

Archbishop Trench does not admit the possibility of the idol worship of Æsculapius, or the malignant persecution to death of Antipas, as accounting for the use of the expression, "where Satan's throne is," or "where Satan dwelleth," and regards it as "an unsolved riddle." But we must bear in mind that for long ages before Christianity was introduced into Pergamum, and even afterwards, that city was the scene of the very worst and most debasing practices, which could only have their inception and execution under the promptings of the Prince of Darkness. Was it not the place where the mysteries of the *Cabiri* were celebrated, so shocking that writers of every country have passed them over in silence, saying it was unlawful to reveal them? Were not the festivals of the *Dionysia*, in honour of Bacchus, observed here as well as in Smyrna, and were not these festivals so corrupting to morals, and so subversive of public decency, that they were banished from Rome by a decree of the Senate? And may we not add to these the *Aphrodisia*, in honour of Venus, and other sacred rites, not less marked by profligacy and wickedness? and crowning all, the worship of Æsculapius already noticed, whose votaries blasphemously attributed to him power to raise the dead, and honoured him with the most sacred titles of the Saviour? Surely if such a centre of evil as was Pergamum, in the days of the last of the Apostles, did not properly come under the appellation of "Satan's seat," it would be difficult to find a place where the term could more appropriately apply. It was the headquarters of evil, where wicked spirits were honoured and worshipped, and that by all classes; and where men were instigated to perpetrate the foulest deeds that ever debased humanity.

The allusion to "Satan's seat," or throne, expresses a distinct proof of a personal Satan. An influence or evil principle could not be spoken of as having a throne, or as dwelling locally. He is called the Prince of the power of the air (Eph. ii. 2), which is the empire where he and his angels operate, until the καιρὸς, or season of judgment is come, when he shall be cast into "the lake of fire" (Rev. xx. 10).

Why Satan is permitted to erect his throne in certain localities, and to do incalculable mischief to the Church of God, as at Pergamum, is one of those mysteries of which it is now impossible to give any satisfactory solution. We cannot see as God sees, and we must patiently wait for the light of eternity to dispel those dark shadows which perplex and bewilder us here. It is sufficient for us that Christ was the spoiler of principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross; and to know that through His grace "all those evils, which the craft and subtilty of the devil or man worketh against us, will be brought to nought, and that by the providence of His goodness they shall be dispersed." It is our privilege, and it is our strength too, to feel that when temptations assail—when lagging behind in the discharge of duty, or being lured onward in the path of sin—while we are conscious of the subtilty of the tempter, there is One ever near us, who overcame the Prince of Darkness, and who is able to defend and to succour those who are tempted. That the Church in Pergamum should be so beset by the powers of evil was its trial; but, through its living and Divine Head, it might also be its triumph.

"I know where thou dwellest." It was not the Church's choice to fix its dwelling there—not like Lot, selecting the well watered plains of the Jordan—it was the appointment of Christ that even there it should be as a light shining in the darkness, bearing witness for Him, and protesting against

both the abominations of heathenism, and the impious teaching of false brethren. It is as much as to say, "I know your difficulties, and the perils to which you are exposed, and I sympathize with you." It is said that love lightens labour: not less does sympathy alleviate sorrow; and to have the assurance in our hearts that there is One who, in all our sorrows and sufferings, is "a brother born for adversity," reconciles us to our lot, and removes the dark cloud. "I know where thou dwellest." Christ has placed us there, and we have a mission to discharge; and, whatever may be the surroundings, the thought that we are in His service, and carrying out His purpose, is sufficient to cheer us onward, knowing that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. These Christians at Pergamum, like Daniel and the three children at Babylon, were found faithful among the faithless; they were not carried headlong by the strong current of temptation, but "resisted unto blood striving against sin." He who had given them grace to triumph might make them, by their example, the means of leading others from their dumb idols to the service of the living God.

καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, κ.τ.λ., *and thou holdest fast My name, and didst not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas.* Of this faithful martyr we know absolutely nothing except what is said here respecting him. Some have conjectured that the name, Ἀντίπας, which signifies *against all*, is to be taken in a symbolical, not in a literal, signification; but there are no good grounds for this. No doubt, like Athanasius, he was one who stood out against the world; and although early writers pass him over in silence, we are not to suppose he had no actual existence, Tertullian[1] makes a passing reference to him, it is true, but he throws no light upon his position in or relationship to the Church

[1] *Scorpiace*, cap. 12.

at Pergamum. Later writers have published details of his martyrdom, but they have no reliable authority. In the *Acta Sanctorum*, it is stated that he was Bishop of Pergamum in the reign of Domitian, that by order of the tyrant he was shut up in a brazen bull, which was afterwards heated red hot, and that having thus suffered the most agonizing death, he obtained the Martyr's crown. It is strange that Eusebius, who gives so full an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, has taken no notice of Antipas, one who has received so noble a testimony to his faithfulness from Christ Himself; and it is even more surprising, when we find mention made by Eusebius[1] of at least four who suffered martyrdom—three at Pergamum; Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice, and one who suffered in the persecutions of Lyons and Vienne, and who belonged to Pergamum. But what matter that the name has not found a place on the records of historians, when it is registered in the Lamb's Book of Life; and, like her who took the alabaster box of precious ointment and poured it on the Saviour's head, wheresoever in the whole world the gospel is preached, the honoured name of Antipas, who was faithful unto death, shall be proclaimed, and the noble testimony of the Church in Pergamum, with which he was connected, shall be handed down from generation to generation. He shines as a star of the first magnitude in the galaxy of Revelation, unnoticed among men, for "the world knoweth us not," but honoured of Christ, for "the Lord knoweth them that are His." On the bead-roll of Christianity, among the noble army of Martyrs, his name is found marked with distinguished glory, for the inscription was dictated by the Son of God Himself: "ANTIPAS THAT FAITHFUL MARTYR OF MINE!" When the monumental brass and the sculptured marble shall have perished in the decay of nature, this memorial shall stand, because it is the record of Him whose words shall never pass away.

[1] *Eusebius* iv. 15.

It is to the honour of the Church at Pergamum that, at the time when Antipas was the faithful martyr of Christ, there were many others who had not been influenced by the fear of death to deny the faith, or disown Christ, but were ready, if called upon, to brave all danger, and endure the bitter pains of death in its most terrible forms, rather than become traitors to the cause of truth. The heathen god, Æsculapius, had claimed to be healer, saviour, protector ; and the Christians, who regarded these blasphemous assumptions as derogatory to the glory of their master, must have faithfully proclaimed Christ as the true and only Σωτὴρ, and, by so doing, made themselves objects of detestation to some like Demetrius the silversmith, and others at Ephesus, who saw their craft in danger. We must admire the zeal and earnestness of those brave followers of Christ amid the temptations with which they were surrounded. If the heroes who fight their country's battles are the recipients of well-earned distinctions on their return after victory, surely those who, in the cause of truth and righteousness, have witnessed bravely for Christ, are no less entitled to the admiration and esteem of their brethren who have enlisted in the same cause, although they may not have to engage in the same hard warfare.

It has been said, "Prosperity gains friends, but adversity tries them" ; and it is not otherwise as regards the friends of Christ. In the days of calm and sunshine, it is not difficult to bless God, when we see around us so many tokens of temporal prosperity ; but when called upon to meet the tribulation, when we see the little cloud on the horizon, like a man's hand, foreboding the gathering storm,—when long-cherished plans fail, friends become either faithless or few, the springs of health get diminished or dried up, disappointments meet us here and sufferings there,—the test of our religious principles is then applied, and whether they will bear the strain, this is the difficulty. If we were to place

ourselves in the same position as the Church of Pergamum, could we hope to receive the same approval from the lips of Christ? Many of those early Christians had manfully struggled, and the trial of their faith redounded to the honour and glory of God. Would it be so now? "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

Ver. 14. *Ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαὰμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι.* *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.* Hitherto all that has been said of Pergamum was highly in its praise—good works apparent, much zeal for God shown, faithfulness to the truth in the midst of gross idolatry and wickedness, although that faithfulness had deprived the Church of one of its brightest ornaments in the person of Antipas. Now what the fires of martyrdom could not accomplish, a secret and insidious snare within the Church itself was capable of effecting. "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam," etc. Balaam was a man of considerable pretensions to religion, who had, at the same time, strong tendencies to vice. His character is a kind of puzzle, as in him extremes meet. That he was gifted with the spirit of prophecy does not necessarily imply that he had the higher endowment of Divine grace. While, on the one hand, he professed devotion to God; on the other, he was carried away with the besetting sin of selfishness, which manifested itself in covetousness and ambition. He pretended to have great zeal for God, yet the measure of it was the worldly gain that he might derive from it. His hollowness and hypocrisy point him out as one of

the most subtle and dangerous enemies of the Church of God, and he is designated by St. Augustine, *propheta Diaboli.* When he went to curse Israel it was to obtain "the wages of unrighteousness." He knew the people were blessed of God, and that it was contrary to the Divine will that any one pretending to be commissioned by God should curse them; but the rewards of divination operated with such force on his corrupt heart, that he was ready to go at all hazards to secure the prize. It may be said, God gave him permission to go; but that permission was a judicial act, and as a punishment to him, for "there is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." His conscience told him he was acting wrongly, yet he sinned against its most solemn promptings. Conscience and covetousness were like two forces acting at right angles, and for a time there was a compromise between depravity and duty; but at length, when he found he could not obtain "the wages of unrighteousness" by cursing Israel, he instructs Balak, King of Moab, as to the means by which, with carnal fascinations, he might corrupt those whom it was vain for him to curse. And when the people of Israel were thus overcome, they joined themselves to Baal-Peor, by participating in heathen worship, and eating meats offered in sacrifice to idols (Num. xxv. 3).

Now the blame attached to the Church at Pergamum is that it had in it them that held the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel. In the Book of Numbers (xxiv. 25,) we are not told directly that Balaam gave these instructions. It is merely said that he returned to his place, and Balak went his way, after Balaam had uttered the sublime prophecy of the Star that should come out of Jacob; but the expression, "returned to his place," may mean nothing more than that he set off towards home, and proceeded only as far as the encampment of the Midianites; for it is certain that, shortly after, he was

slain among the Midianites (Num. xxxi. 8). There was therefore sufficient opportunity for communicating to Balak the plan by which the Israelites were to be seduced from their allegiance to God and to become worshippers of Baal-Peor.

The construction, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ, has been alluded to by some writers as an instance of the imperfect knowledge of Greek which led to the use of an idiom more or less Hebraic, rather than as a deliberate use of the *dativus commodi;* and they refer to ver. 20, where the verb, δίδασκει, takes an accusative after it, as verbs of teaching properly do. But if there was imperfect knowledge of Greek in the construction in ver. 14, is it not strange that this imperfection should vanish in ver. 20? The dative τῷ Βαλὰκ coming after ἐδίδασκε is not a construction which points to insufficient knowledge of Greek, for in *Heracl.*, 576, and Eurip., *Med.*, 279, we find the dative of the person following the verb δίδασκε, *ex. gr.* δίδασκε μοι τοιούσδε τούσδε παῖδας εἰς τὸ πᾶν σοφοὺς ὥσπερ σύ. That Balaam directly communicated the instruction to Balak is here shown, but how came the name of Balaam to be the synonym of the corrupt doctrines that were being taught and propagated in the Church of Pergamum? Has the Hebrew, Balaam, any similarity to the Nicolaus, or Nicolaitans, of the New Testament? In Num. xxii. 5, where Balaam's name is first introduced, it is in Hebrew בִּלְעָם (*Bileam*), and is derived from בָּלַע, "to devour, or destroy," and עָם "the people." The form, Balaam, is taken from the Septuagint. Now the word "Nicolaitans," exactly expresses in Greek what "Balaamites" does in Hebrew, for Νικόλαος is derived from νικάω, "to conquer, or vanquish," and λαὸς, "the people." We may, therefore, regard the words as synonymous; and "those that hold the doctrine of Balaam," and those that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, as identical.[1] Balaam, in Old Testament times, was typical of the founder of the sect of

[1] Compare Rev. ii. 6.

the Nicolaitans, who, under the assumed garb of high spiritual pretensions, encouraged and indulged in the most vicious practices which ever debased the name of Christianity. The stumbling-block which they placed before the Church of Pergamum was that which Balak, taught by Balaam, had recourse to in order to destroy the people of Israel.

In Pergamum, idolatry of the most revolting character was shamelessly practised. The heathen worship of Aphrodite was conducted by harlot priestesses, and the most infamous and profligate conduct characterized the votaries of that deity. The heathen felt no compunction of conscience; on the contrary, they were self-satisfied because they were only faithfully carrying out the precepts of their religion; but the Christians, who had been taught the principles of the Gospel, must view these matters differently. They had a higher code of morals, and their responsibility was proportionately increased; and what might be in some degree palliated, from ignorance, in the heathen, would be treated as highly sinful on the part of those who knew a purer faith. The heathen might look upon these excesses with impunity, but not so others. Now these Nicolaitans seem to have taken the heathen standpoint, while pretending to be Christians—professing to know God, but by their works denying Him, "being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

The word translated "stumbling-block," *σκάνδαλον*, means a trap, or snare, which, placed in one's way, might entangle the foot, and cause one to fall. It is used in this sense by the LXX., who render the Hebrew, מוֹקֵשׁ (*mokesh*), by the Greek, *σκάνδαλον*, and in the New Testament, it bears the same meaning—anything placed in the way that would cause one to stumble. Christ said to St. Peter (Matt. xvi. 23), "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-stone (*σκάνδαλον*) to Me." By attempting to dissuade Christ from

dying, he showed he did not rightly understand the object of Christ's coming into the world; and that carnal weakness which he evinced would possibly have its effect upon others. So these Balaamites, by their wicked practices and corrupt teaching, were bringing disgrace upon the Church, and were an occasion of stumbling to many weak Christians; while to the heathen who were looking on, they would appear as full of hypocrisy and deceit. Balaam, the hypocritical prophet, taught Balak how to entrap a nation, and lay it prostrate at his feet; not less so were these imitators, and followers of the wicked prophet, by their practical Atheism and unblushing depravity, undermining the very foundations of Christianity and morality, and attempting to destroy the Church at Pergamum. What fellowship could there be between Christ and Belial—what communion between light and darkness—what part could the worshipper of the Holy God have with the votary of Venus or Bacchus, or the devil-worshipper of the entwined serpent, as the representative of Æsculapius, the healing god? The two prominent sins of the Balaamites of Pergamum consisted in eating meats offered to idols, *φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα*, and in committing fornication (*πορνεῦσαι*).

As regards "meats offered to idols," or things sacrificed to idols, we find in the decisions of the First Council of the Christian Church held at Jerusalem, that abstinence from these was positively enjoined (Acts xv. 20, 29). There was a like precept given as regards fornication; and the reasons were obvious.

(1) Because the eating meats sacrificed to idols was always connected with the worship of idols. While meats used in such sacrifices were partly the perquisite of the priests, and when they had more than they could use, the surplus was sold to the meat-dealers, who, afterwards, disposed of it to the public; still the purchase of such meats, and their use,

though matters of indifference, in so far as the individual conscience was concerned, were not so in regard to the consciences of weak brethren.

(2) Then fornication, amongst the heathen, was treated as lawful, nay, it was consecrated by sacred rites, and temples and priests and priestesses were set apart in its honour; and to prevent Gentile converts from falling back into the practices of the heathen, it was necessary to exhort them, and not only so, but bind them, by solemn precept, to abstain from that particular sin. The heathen treated it with indifference, but Gentile converts must be taught that it was contrary to the precepts of the New Testament, not less so than to the law of Moses. In 1 Cor. viii., St. Paul shows that some things which are in themselves indifferent, are to be strictly avoided, when they are the occasion of stumbling to weak brethren. Among these are meats offered in sacrifice to idols. Many of the Christians at Corinth, to show their superior knowledge, and the strength of their faith, boasted that they might sit in the idol temple, and eat the meats offered in sacrifice to idols, because an idol was nothing in the world —the gods represented by these *simulacra* had no existence —and therefore there was no scruple of conscience in such an act; but, on the contrary, the very fact of eating freely what was offered in sacrifice to them was a proof of their belief in the non-existence of these false gods. They knew the living and true God, of whom are all things, and if they had believed in the "gods many and lords many" of heathendom, they would have hesitated before eating such meats, because they who participated in them ate them with the consciousness of the idol, as offered in worship to it, and with that reverential dread with which the Gentiles approached their deities. Now St. Paul, while treating the case of eating, or not eating, as a matter of indifference abstractly, tells them they have not merely to please them-

selves in this instance, but they are to take care as to the effect that their conduct will have upon others. "All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient;" and what might be quite indifferent as regards each one personally, would be viewed in a very different light in relation to those who were looking on at a distance. We are not to become an occasion of stumbling to weak brethren. If Gentile converts, whose eyes may not have been fully opened, but who, like the blind man at Bethsaida, when first touched by our Lord, merely could see men as trees, walking, would notice their fellow-Christians, of enlarged minds and matured experience, sitting at the feasts in the idol temple, they might naturally think that the purer faith which they now professed was no better than that which they had abandoned, and gradually sink back into heathenism; and, therefore, the faithful in Pergamum must take heed lest their liberty should become a stumbling-block to the weak, and destroy the weak brother for whom Christ died.

There are some writers in the present day who have endeavoured to show that the Pauline teaching in this matter is in direct antagonism with that which we have in the Epistle to the Church at Pergamum—because *εἰδωλόθυτα* is not condemned by St. Paul in the abstract, while it is here alluded to as one of the forms of error for the permission of which the Church at Pergamum is censured. The Council at Jerusalem had placed "things sacrificed to idols" in the same category as eating of blood and things strangled, and fornication; but St. Paul does not make any reference to the decision of that Council as of authority, but takes a course that some might suppose to be adverse to the decree made at Jerusalem. That decree was a kind of compromise for the Jewish Christians not enforcing circumcision upon the Gentile Christians; but what St. Paul says respecting "idol meats," he states upon the authority

of Divine inspiration, and independent of all Church decrees. The eating, or not eating, things sacrificed to idols was a matter of conscience. If one could partake of them without violating its dictates, abstractly there would be no injury done; for it was a thing indifferent. If one partook of them he was no worse, if he abstained he was no better. The fact was it was almost impossible for the Christians who were residing in heathen cities to obtain meat which had not either directly or indirectly been used in idol worship. If invited to a feast, no one could positively know whether the meat that was eaten had not previously been offered to one of the heathen deities, or the wine which was drunk had not been part of a libation. If the Christians partook of it, asking no questions for conscience' sake, they were not to be condemned for that act; but if they knowingly received it as a portion of what had been offered in sacrifice, or if, by doing so, they offended the conscience of weak brethren, they were censurable. They were not to do evil that good might come, or enter an idol temple, and sit at a banquet, on pretence of glorifying God, by treating idol meats as indifferent, because the gods represented by the idols had no existence; but they were to keep their own consciences pure, and to guard against anything that would offend the conscience of those who were fellow-worshippers. St. Paul in no way places himself against either the decree of the Council at Jerusalem, or the teaching of the Epistle to the Church in Pergamum; for nowhere does he enjoin the use of meats offered to idols, but, speaking abstractly, merely regards them with indifference, if used in ignorance of their application, and condemns their use if attended with consequences which were perilous to the faith. Marcion and his followers boasted that they could sit in an idol temple, and partake of the idol meats, and be in no way injured by them—and this

on pretence of the exercise of Christian liberty ; but Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, condemned these self-willed usurpers of the name of Christ as acting utterly at variance with the precepts of Christ and His Apostles.

The Nicolaitans, or Balaamites of Pergamum, were the forerunners of the Marcionites of a subsequent period, and these Balaamites, had their representatives in the Church at Corinth at an earlier time ; for St. Paul distinctly alludes to the doings of the Israelites in Shittim, as a warning to the Corinthians against the excesses which brought destruction to three and twenty thousand in one day (1 Cor. x. 8). At Pergamum, there was good reason why Christian professors should be careful to shun the very appearance of evil, for their heathen neighbours were persecuting them to the death ; and, under such circumstances, it was not to be supposed there could be much social intercourse, and, least of all, that Christians should be seen in an idol temple partaking of idol meats, in company with those who were doing their utmost to exterminate Christianity from the face of the earth. If, therefore, the Church in Pergamum kept in its communion persons who thus acted—who one day would be seen in the assemblies of Christians, and the next in a heathen temple, conniving at idolatry if not actually entering into idolatrous worship, and guilty of the demoralizing practices connected with such worship, it would be unworthy of the Christian name ; and for omitting to manifest a holy impatience of evil, it would be highly censurable. Tolerance of evil indicated a decadence from the first principles of Christianity, and brought rebuke upon Pergamum. How different in this respect was the Church at Ephesus, that could not bear evil men, and that "tried them that said they were Apostles but were not, and found them liars." The promise of Paternal recognition and reception on the part of God is only conditional on our maintaining separation from

the world that lieth in the wicked one: "Come out, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18).

Ver. 15. *Οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως· So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.* The word, ὁμοίως, likewise, or in like manner, shows that the teaching of Balaam was identical with that of the Nicolaitans. Those who repeated the sin of Balaam so as to draw away Christians from their allegiance to God, by holding out inducements to indulge in sensual gratification, under pretence of mortifying the flesh, and to join in idol feasts by way of showing their disregard for idolatry, and under pretence of honouring God, may be considered as belonging to the Nicolaitans. They did not form a distinct sect in the Apostolic age, although afterwards they did; for Clement of Alexandria speaks of them as a sect existing in his time, and alludes to their abominable practices. As in the first age the great controversy was as to the admission of the Gentiles into the Church without circumcision, so in the second century there was this Gnostic libertinism eating like a canker into the very centre of the Church's life. Men turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, abused the freedom of the Gospel, and promised liberty to others, while they themselves were the servants of corruption; and, having forsaken the right way, went astray, "following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." That the Churches of Lesser Asia were infested with these corrupt teachers, we have full proof; for while Ephesus, to which reference has already been made, was praised for its intolerance of this form of false doctrine, Pergamum is censured for its supineness in permitting those who held such errors to remain in fellowship

with it. In some MSS. the words, ὃ μισῶ, are added after ὁμοίως, or ὁμοίως is placed after ὃ μισῶ. The "Textus Receptus" has these words, and therefore they are found in the Authorized Version: not so in the Revised New Testament. They are omitted without note or comment. The weight of authority seems without doubt to be with the Revisers, for ὃ μισῶ are not found in any of the ancient MSS. They are not in the Alexandrine, the Vatican, the Sinaitic, or the Codex Ephraem Syri: and in the few Cursives in which they are found, they may have been inserted by mistake for ὁμοίως—adopting ὃ μισῶ in place of ὁμοίως—between which words there is a great similarity; or because this expression occurs in ii. 6, where the deeds of the Nicolaitans are mentioned as hated by the Angel of the Church in Ephesus, it may have been thought by transcribers necessary to add ὃ μισῶ in a similar connexion. That such teachings and manner of life as characterized the Nicolaitans were hateful to the Head of the Church is obvious; and what was hateful to Him, should have been hated by the Angel of the Church in Pergamum; and for the want of this righteous indignation against evil, we see how solemn a call to repentance is addressed to that Church, and what a fearful punishment is threatened in case of disobedience. (Compare ii. 6.)

Ver. 16. *Μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ, καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου. Repent, therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.* There is a transition in this verse from the Angel of the Church, to whom the first clause evidently refers, to the Church itself, to which the threatening in the last part applies. Repent, or else I will come to thee quickly: and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Clearly the Angel of the Church was blameworthy, as well as the Church itself; for he had been

remiss in his duty of warning the people against the Nicolaitans and their false teaching. There had been a great want of force of character, a moral feebleness, which caused the trumpet to give an uncertain sound. The wicked was not warned from his evil way, he was kept in connexion with the Church, and allowed to go on and to die in his iniquity; so his blood would be required at the watchman's hand (Ezek. xxxiii. 6). He was now called upon to repent, so as to testify against the deeds of the Nicolaitans, if haply he might recover some of them from the snare of the devil, who were led captive by him at his will, or to expel them from the communion of the faithful, if they should still persist in their wickedness. By so doing he would deliver his own soul, as he would be pure from the blood of these perverse libertines; but if he neglected to rouse himself from apathy and culpable negligence, the Lord would come to him quickly with the solemn call: "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." For the rest, he would come to them with judgment. He would fight against the workers of iniquity as his enemies. His Church must withdraw from those that walk disorderly. "I have written unto you," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. v. 11).

Christ's coming with the sword of His mouth may be either with the object of punishing, or persuading. Some think the allusion is to the manner in which Balaam was slain by the sword of the children of Israel (Num. xxxi. 8), which was also the sword of God. Christ's coming in that sense would be punitive; but may it not have a purifying effect too? The sword which St. John saw proceeding out of Christ's mouth was ἡ ῥομφαία, the heavy broadsword with two edges. In this verse it is the same, ῥομφαία, and while the sword of

Christ's mouth goes forth to punish, it has also another mission, that of rousing the conscience to vigorous action. The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, and may we not regard it here as indicating that Christ would raise up faithful teachers who would go forth in the power of the Spirit, and destroy not only those forms of error which had disfigured the Church in Pergamum, but bring back the wayward and erring apostates to the knowledge of the truth? The weapons employed in this warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

Ver. 17. *Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις· Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καί δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον, ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches; To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.* Here is a warfare to be accomplished, and to the victor in the battle, there is a promise of a reward suited to the character of the conflict. To those who had not been carried away by temptation so as to sit in the idol's temple, and join in the idol feasts, there should be given meat to eat that the world knows not of. The conqueror of self, the controller of unregulated desire, he who had not been carried away by divers lusts, should have the hidden manna. St. John had already been conversant with the figure. In John vi. 51, our Lord had spoken of giving His disciples the living bread which came down from heaven, and partaking of which they should live for ever. For forty years the Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness. This was typical of Christ, the true Bread, and those spiritual and heavenly blessings which we enjoy through Him; and the conqueror's reward here

promised was obviously communion with Christ, and the unending bliss of His Divine Presence.

The reward is future, although there are here foretastes of it. Those who are Christ's are here fed with Angels' food, for their souls are strengthened and refreshed by His Body and Blood. The outer world understands not the secret of the Christian's joy, for it is hidden from the eye of sense and concealed from the carnally minded. "Our life," says the Apostle, "is hid with Christ in God." In Him are laid up all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, as the manna of old was laid up in the Ark of the Covenant. There can be no doubt that reference is here made to the manna which was by Divine command deposited in the golden pot, and placed in the Holy of Holies before the Testimony, where it was preserved for many generations. The Jews believed that the sacred treasures of the sanctuary were never lost. Even when the Chaldeans invaded Judea, and carried into captivity the two tribes which remained after the ten tribes had been reduced to exile by Shalmanezer, it was thought that the Prophet Jeremiah had carried these treasures to Mount Pisgah (*2* Macc. ii. 4, 7), "The mountain where Moses climbed up, and saw the heritage of God," and that they were to be kept there, no man knowing of the place, "until the time that God gather His people again together, and show them His mercy." The manna laid up before the Testimony received the name of *hidden*, not "occultum," but "reconditum," as Archbishop Trench properly observes, and it was a perfect type of Christ's body now "within the veil," withdrawn from sight, but yet to be revealed when the "times of refreshing shall come, from the presence of the Lord." The word "hidden," is used in some parts of Holy Scripture in the sense of "precious," as in Ps. xvii. 14: "Whose bellies thou fillest with thy hid treasures;" so that the "hidden manna," would express all that was unspeakably sweet and

delightful. "The pleasures for evermore," are those which the sanctuary of God in heaven affords, and the fulness of joy such as "a stranger cannot intermeddle with." The Beatific Vision, and, through it, the transformation into Christ's image,—this will be the fruition of the hidden manna, this will be the fulfilment of the promise to those who "touch not the unclean thing," who keep their garments spotless, and whose lives are hid with Christ in God.

καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, κ.τ.λ., *and I will give him a white stone, etc.* There has been a great variety of opinion as to what this means, and it is difficult to arrive at a correct interpretation of the passage. Illustrations have been sought from Grecian, Roman, and Jewish customs, and none of them have removed the obscurity with which it is invested. In no previous portion of Holy Scripture do we read of any such gift bestowed on account of faithful service, nor, indeed, any allusion to a "white stone" at all. The word, λευκὸς, *white*, corresponds to the Latin "candidus," and gives the idea of brightness, such as that which characterized the Lord's Transfiguration, and it is used to express the dazzling splendour of that appearance. White is the emblem of purity, and it also denotes joy and gladness. It is the colour which is associated with all our ideas of heaven. There are white robes for the redeemed; the Redeemer is described as clothed in garments of light; and the New Jerusalem is compared to a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. All these descriptions indicate that white is the symbol of that world where Christ in His glorified humanity reigns; and, when He shall return, He shall take His seat on the great white throne.

From this particular view of the word, λευκὸς, Archbishop Trench considers that the stone in question must have been a precious stone; one not merely white in appearance, but glistering white, as a diamond; and he further thinks that

we are not to look for the meaning of the "white stone" outside Jewish symbols—that the customs of heathen antiquity are not to have a place in our interpretation of the Apocalypse. This rule seems rather too severe, and especially as Pergamum was a heathen city, and the practices condemned were in connexion with the idolatries of the heathen. If, then, there was to be something to overbalance the pleasures enjoyed by the Nicolaitan, whose chief good seemed to be the sitting at idol feasts in the idol temple, and the indulgence of carnal gratification, surely we have no reason to look far for a symbol by which admission to a heavenly feast might be foreshadowed; and therefore, in the "white stone" in its use as a passport to heaven's joys and pleasures, we may not be wrong in borrowing our ideas from the practices which prevailed at the time when the Message was sent to Pergamum. But before noticing these, we shall see whether Archbishop Trench's application of the white stone to the Urim and Thummim is warrantable.

What were the Urim and Thummim? They are first mentioned in Exod. xxviii. 30. There is much diversity of opinion as to what is meant by these. Some refer them to the stones set in the breastplate of the High Priest, on which were engraved the names of the twelve Hebrew tribes. The LXX.[1] have rendered these two words by ἡ δήλωσις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια, *Manifestation and Truth* (Exod. xxviii. 30); and it is thought these are merely explanations of the stones on the breastplate. Some are of opinion that the Urim and Thummim were something attached to the breastplate, and quite distinct from the twelve stones, and that in this was placed one or two stones—diamonds it is supposed, because the diamond is not mentioned among the other stones of the High Priest's

[1] It may be noticed here that the rendering of the LXX. is imperfect, for although אוּרִים might be represented by ἡ δήλωσις, תֻּמִּים which means *perfection*, does not correspond to ἡ ἀλήθεια, *truth*. The most correct rendering of the two Hebrew words is φωτισμοὶ καὶ τελειότητες, signifying respectively *Light* and *Perfection*.

breastplate; and that upon this was engraved the Tetragrammaton, or name, יְהֹוָה. This was the opinion of Epiphanius, but St. Augustine does not admit of either these additional stones, or of any miraculous splendour in them, because Holy Scripture says nothing respecting them. The Urim and Thummim belonged solely to the High Priest, and were consulted by him on rare occasions, and only for public personages.

The Rabbins consider that this oracular manifestation continued only during the period of the Tabernacle. They say, "The Holy Spirit spoke to Israel by Urim and Thummim under the Tabernacle; under the first Temple by prophets; and under the second Temple by the Bath-col, or Daughter of the Voice, meaning a voice sent down from heaven, such as at Christ's baptism and transfiguration." Josephus states that this oracle ceased 112 years B.C. But what meaning could be conveyed to the Angel of the Church at Pergamum by the promise of the "white stone," as connected with the hidden manna? There is no reference to the Urim and Thummim in the New Testament; and surely a particular oracular manifestation confined to the Jewish High Priest could hardly be regarded as a symbol of admission to the feast of love in heaven. Besides, although the term λευκὸς, is applied to what is bright and shining, the word ψῆφος, does not convey the idea of a precious stone, but rather a coarse stone, such as a pebble. The word λίθος, is used by the LXX. to denote a precious stone, and it would, most likely, have been adopted here if the Urim and Thummim were referred to.

The white stone was to be the possession of all who should overcome; not merely that of the Angel of the Church, but of every member of the flock who had overcome the temptations presented by the idol meats, and abominable indulgences. We must, therefore, look for its meaning in some usage which

was understood at the time, and which would convey a motive for steadfast resistance to temptation on the part of the Church at Pergamum. White pebbles, or beans, were used in ancient times in casting lots, and were always associated with what was happy, joyous, and propitious. The Thracians, or Scythians, barbarous as they were, were accustomed to mark each happy day they spent by casting a white stone into an urn, and each miserable day by a black stone; and, when they died, their survivors took out the stones and counted them, and according as the white or black stones preponderated, they regarded their lives as either happy or wretched.[1]

There was another use of white stones in ancient times. In the administration of justice by the Greeks, when persons were put upon their trial, the presiding judge gave to each of the judges associated with him, a white and black stone, or pebble, and after the evidence was heard, each judge dropped into the ballot box, or urn, either a white stone or a black, according to his opinion of the innocence or guilt of the individual accused. If the white stones were more in number than the black, the accused was acquitted; if otherwise, he was condemned. So Ovid, *Metam.*, xv. 41, says,

> "Mos erat antiquus niveis atrisque lapillis.
> His damnare reos, illis absolvere culpâ."

This usage is merely alluded to in order to show that the custom of having recourse to white or black stones was well known throughout the heathen world, and that the white stone would always convey the idea of what was joyous and fortunate, while black stones would indicate the reverse. It is quite true, that in the case of the administration of justice, the stones were not given to the acquitted or condemned, and that in this particular the application fails in regard to the promise to the Church in Pergamum. It

[1] *Pliny, H.N.*, vii. 41, quoted by Trench.

further fails, inasmuch as the mere acquittal, or expression of approval, on the part of the judge, could scarcely be construed into a reward for self-denial and perseverance in resisting the inducements to temptation presented by the temples of the heathen gods, and their idolatrous feasts. We would look for something beyond the "well done!" something which would cause the pleasures of sin to lose their attractiveness, and the fading things of sense to dissolve into vapour by reason of the glory that excelleth. The substantial enjoyment of the bliss of heaven, the transformation into Christ's image, the crown of life—all these would be rightly conferred upon him to whom the white stone was presented; and the allusion must therefore be looked for to some usage of a different character.

That which seems most suitable is the *tessera*, or stone which the conquerors at the Olympic games received from the master. These stones were called by the Greeks, *Σύμβολα*, and upon those who received such stones there were certain distinctions conferred, and privileges bestowed, amongst which there was the right of free access to the public entertainments. These *tesseræ* extended to private life, and when they were exchanged between individuals, the parties so bound by these tokens, would necessarily recognise one another in offices of friendship and hospitality. This is the view taken by Ewald, and others as to the interpretation of the white stone. Plumptre adds to this, what may be regarded as making the application still more warrantable, that the use of the *tessera* was well known in Asia Minor as a passport to heathen banquets. To each guest invited to the idol feasts, a stone was given with the name of the person written on it; and specimens of such *tesseræ*, giving the bearer admission, for example, to the theatre of Dionysos, at Athens, are to be now seen among the Greek antiquities of the British Museum. If, therefore

such stones were given to those who were invited to the heathen feasts, there is a perfect connexion between the different parts of the passage; and the Church in Pergamum would readily understand that those who were faithful in resisting the errors of these Nicolaitan seducers, would receive a *tessera* that would be a token of admission to the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν, κ.τ.λ., and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it. As upon the *tessera* the name of each guest was written and as it could not be used by any but the person for whom it was intended, so no one can enter into the presence of Christ by the merits of others. In Isa. lxii. 2, a new name was promised—"Thou shalt be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name." The change of name in ancient times was always accompanied by some special grace. When Abram was changed into Abraham, it was after God had promised a seed through Isaac, numerous as the stars of heaven; and when Sarai was changed into Sarah, "Mother of nations," the transformation had the same significance; so in the New Testament, Simon Barjona, after his confessing Christ, the Son of the Living God, was changed into Peter, as was Saul of Tarsus into Paul, on entering upon his first Apostolic journey, as we find in Acts xiii. 9. So, too, the followers of Christ were first called disciples; at Antioch, they were called Christians, named by the name of their Master. What this new name shall be that shall be written on the white stone we know not, nor was it intended to be known by us here. We must only wait until the day shall come when Christ shall name it. In the meantime, he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself (1 John v. 10). He can say, "I know in whom I have believed," and in the day of Christ's appearing, when the right of admission to the banqueting house of the Great King shall be obtained, the new name will also

be disclosed, indicative of that transformed character which we shall possess when "beholding the face of Christ in righteousness, we shall be satisfied when we shall awake in His likeness." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Ps. xxv. 14). Who is there that can most feel the joy of pardoning grace and mercy, but he who has most known the plague of his own heart? and who is there that can enter into perfect communion with Christ, but he who has that relish for heavenly things which the Holy Spirit alone can give? Heaven would be no heaven to an unrenewed heart. To realize its joys and happiness there must be here a corresponding spiritual sense, a preparatory process by which, as in a glass beholding the image of the Lord, we become transformed into the same image, from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The investing with a new name is a token of honour and dignity; so there is honour awaiting all the saints. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Compared with earthly things they stand out in overwhelming magnitude. They have eternity inscribed upon them. The kingdom which we shall receive is one that can never be removed, the manna upon which we shall feed shall never lose its life-sustaining properties, and the new name shall never become obliterated from the *tessera* which Christ shall give us. When the names of kings and heroes and sages shall have perished from the records of earth, the new name shall stand unchanged, because it is registered in the Lamb's Book of Life. It was this which Christ told His disciples to rejoice in, and it is this that shall be the theme of wonder to angels, as it shall be the source of joy to the redeemed family of God through eternity, as they chant the praises of Him who washed them from their sins through His blood. "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. v. 13).

IV.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA.

18 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς, καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·

19 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην, καὶ τὴν διακονίαν, καὶ τὴν πίστιν, καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου, τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων.

20 Ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζαβὲλ, ἡ λέγουσα καὶ ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν, καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους, πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα.

21 Καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ· καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

22 Ἰδοὺ, βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην, καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς, εἰς θλῖψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς.

23 Καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ· καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι, ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἐρευνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας· καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν.

24 Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω, τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσι τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ, ὡς λέγουσιν, οὐ βαλλῶ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος·

25 Πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε, κρατήσατε ἄχρις οὗ ἂν ἥξω.

26 Καὶ ὁ νικῶν, καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν.

27 Καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ· ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται, ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ Πατρός μου·

28 Καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.

29 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet like to burnished brass.

19 I know thy works, and thy charity, and thy service, and faith, and thy patience, and that thy last works are more than the first.

20 But I have *this* against thee, that thou sufferest thy wife Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and both teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her time that she should repent; and she is not willing to repent of her fornication.

22 Behold, I cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he who searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.

24 But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who did not know the depths of Satan, as they say; I cast not upon you any other burden.

25 But that which ye have, hold fast till I come.

26 And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter are broken to shivers: even as I have received of my Father.

28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

IV.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA.

CHAP. ii. 18, *to end.*

Ver. 18. *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς, καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ. And to the angel of the Church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like to burnished brass.* In regard to the Churches of Smyrna and Pergamum we are quite uninformed as to their history antecedent to the time when the Apocalyptic Messages were sent, as no mention of their names is found elsewhere than in the Revelation ; but in respect to the Church in Thyatira it is different. In Acts xvi. 14, Thyatira is casually referred to in connexion with St. Paul's second missionary journey. After that remarkable vision which the Apostle had at Troas, summoning him to Macedonia, we are told that he went in a straight course by the island of Samothrace, and reached the harbour of Neapolis, which was not far from Philippi. This city is described as *πρώτη τῆς μερίδος τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις κολωνία* ; not the capital city, for Amphipolis was the chief city of the district ; but rather the first city of the province of Macedonia to which St. Paul came under Divine direction. There it was that, on the sabbath day, he first sought the *προσευχὴ*, or place of public prayer, where the Jews were accustomed to assemble, as there was no synagogue, and where the majority of those present were women. Amongst them was

Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, in Lydia. Whatever she may have been previously, it is clear she was not a heathen when St. Paul first met her, for in Acts xvi. 14, we read that she "worshipped God," and that she was with the Jews on the Sabbath by the river side, "where prayer was wont to be made"—thus showing she had joined with them in the *Proseucha*, probably as a proselyte.

On hearing St. Paul preach, "the Lord opened her heart." Not that in every case of conversion the disposition of the heart and will to receive the truth is not attributable to God; but this case was so marked, her conversion having been so immediately effected, and it stood in such prominent contrast with that of her associates, none of whom on that occasion embraced Christianity, that it is specially stated "the Lord opened her heart." She is baptized—her whole household are also admitted to baptism, and she shows her great gratitude, by the reception of the Apostles into her house, which was the first Christian Church planted by St. Paul in Europe, while she was the first convert. We may suppose that Lydia, who was so earnest, and zealous, and whose influence was so powerful in the conversion of her own house, would exert herself, when she returned to Thyatira, in spreading abroad the knowledge of salvation among her countrywomen and others with whom she came in contact; and we may therefore reasonably conjecture that Thyatira had heard of Christ before St. Paul visited Asia Minor, an account of whose labours there we have in Acts xix.

Thyatira, in its geographical position, lay to the S.E. of Pergamum, on the Roman road from Pergamum to Sardis, and about midway between these cities. It was a Macedonian colony founded by Alexander the Great, after his conquest of the Persian Empire. From this fact, we can readily understand how it was that Lydia, the seller of purple, of Thyatira, was in Philippi, the Macedonian city, because there would

necessarily be intercommunication between the colonies and the mother country. Thyatira was celebrated for its great success in the art of dyeing, and in this respect rivalled, if it did not surpass, the reputation of the Tyrians. Inscriptions on ancient monuments confirm this. One has been discovered in honour of Antonius Claudius Alphemus, which concludes with the words, *οἱ βαφεῖς*, the dyers; and while Lydia carried the purple dye to Philippi, and remained there for some time to buy, and sell, and get gain, she returned to bear back to her own country the untold riches of the grace of Christ.

There is another circumstance which connects Thyatira with Macedonia. In Acts xvi. we read of a female slave who had a spirit of divination, in connexion with the Pythian Apollo, who, among the Olympian deities, was the impersonation of morality. At Philippi, the worship of Apollo held a high place; and we might naturally expect that the same worship would be found in Thyatira as in the mother country, of which it was a colony; nor are we wrong in this conjecture, for, at Thyatira, the chief object of religious worship was Apollo, who was venerated as the Sun god. In the Message to the Church at Thyatira, Christ introduces Himself as the Son of God "whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and His feet like to burnished brass"—the one figure indicating keen discernment, the other strength to tread down His enemies. This is the only place in the Revelation where Christ speaks of Himself as the Son of God. In Rev. i. 13, in the remarkable vision which St. John was privileged to see, Christ is spoken of as "One like unto the Son of Man, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;" but in the Message to be sent to Thyatira, Christ declares Himself as the Son of God. In Rev. xix. 13, He is called "the Word of God," an expression peculiar to St. John, and which is also found in his Gospel and Epistles; but the title, "Son of God," is one which ex-

presses more than any other His essential dignity and equality with God the Father. It is not merely to be taken in the sense of theocratic, such as the relationship into which God entered with Israel, nor merely ethical as denoting that authority with which judges, representing God in the Jewish theocracy, administered justice; but truly and properly Divine.

There is no doubt that reference is here made to Ps. ii. 7, where Christ is spoken of in connexion with the God of Israel as His anointed Son, and which verse St. Paul, in Heb. i. 5, quotes in proof of Christ's Divine nature, as far above angels and all created intelligences. "When He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.—Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. i. 6, 8). Surely these passages distinctly proclaim Christ's Godhead; and when He appropriates this title, Son of God, to Himself, He claims to be Supreme Deity. The Jews understood such a title as implying proper Divinity; for on Christ's admitting before the High Priest that He was the Son of God, the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy," and the Jews, on being appealed to, said, "He is guilty of death." It was a claim to substantial oneness with the Father, "very and eternal God;" and when, in addressing the Church at Thyatira, our blessed Lord applies this designation to Himself, it is to impress that Church with a deep sense of His Omnipotence, as One who is able to bestow what He promises, and to inflict the punishment which He threatens. Those who will not be subject to His gentle rule must succumb to His punitive power. He will crush His enemies; "He will break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel," which, when once shivered, cannot be repaired; and all opposition to the erection and extension of His kingdom shall be overthrown. And yet, while He is a God of judgment, He keeps mercy for

thousands: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

Compare Rev. i. 14, 15, where the description, "His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like burnished brass," is explained.

Ver. 19. *Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην, καὶ τὴν διακονίαν, καὶ τὴν πίστιν, καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου, τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων. I know thy works, and thy charity, and thy service, and faith, and thy patience, and that thy last works are more than the first.* The praise here expressed resembles in many points that bestowed upon the Church at Ephesus. Indeed, it has been observed with truth, that the excellencies which are here enumerated, are seen in a very prominent degree in the members of the Church at Philippi. St. Paul speaks of their love, and prays that it may yet abound, more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that they may approve things that are excellent, that they may be "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. i. 9–12).

Those Christian graces which characterized the Philippian Church, it has been thought were owing, in a considerable degree, to the influence brought to bear upon it by the first convert; and if, as we may suppose, Lydia returned to Thyatira, some time after her conversion, her influence would be no less felt in her native city in producing those "fruits of righteousness" for which Thyatira here receives deserved praise. Nor were these virtues and excellencies becoming weakened and losing their lustre by exercise. On the contrary, the last works were more than the first. Under such a healthy condition, one would scarcely be prepared for the censure that follows. While there was much love, and patience, and service, and faith, there was a want of firmness in dealing with error—an effem-

inate profession which would overlook defects, and permit evil workers to remain in communion with the Church, without any protest on the part of the body of the faithful against their principles and practices. In this respect Thyatira was not unlike Pergamum ; but what was required was righteous indignation against evil workers, and the exercise of a godly discipline for the punishing of offenders.

Not only had the Church of Thyatira been remarkable for the manifestation of Christian graces, but it had been a growing Church. The members of that Church had not been resting upon privileges and attainments, but they were making progress, "adding to their faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Pet. i. 5–7). This was just as it should be ; for when God works in us by His Holy Spirit, we are influenced to work for Him. The life of God in the soul is progressive. In the Christian race we cannot here feel satisfied that we have reached the goal. "Not as though we had already attained, or were already perfect," is still the motto of the most experienced Christian. The terminus he reaches to-day is the starting point of to-morrow. Life is a day, and man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening. The measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ is not attained at once. The gourd may grow up in a night, and wither in a night ; but the oak needs years to mature ; and the blast which uproots the tender plant will only cause the monarch of the forest to strike its roots deeper and deeper into the soil. Progress onward, progress ever, is the Christian's aim. "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Let us ever be found in that path—the highway of the King of heaven ; and when we have reached the end of our course, and go to rest in the world's night, weary with the work of

life, it will only be to awake to a joyful resurrection, and find in the retrospect of a blessed experience that "the Lord is a sun and shield; that He will give grace and glory: and no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Ps. lxxxiv. 11).

In striking contrast to the Church of Ephesus, the special note of praise is recorded—"I know thy works . . . and the last to be more than the first." Here was a constant continuance in well-doing, a gradual progression towards perfection; but, in the case of Ephesus, she had left her first love; her first works were more than her last; she was hopelessly retrograding, and if she did not repent, and do the first works so that her flickering light might be made to burn more steadily, it would only result in the candlestick being removed out of its place. In 2 Pet. ii. 20, the Apostle speaks of those who, having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, becoming again entangled therein and overcome γέγονεν αὐτοῖς τὰ ἔσχατα χείρονα τῶν πρώτων, *the last state is become worse than the first.* This was so as regards those Gnostic teachers who, under pretence of being free from all moral restraints, on account of their superior intelligence, taught their followers that they were free to live as they pleased. Better never to have known the truth than to have perverted it. It is like taking the lamp of heaven to light the dark regions of the lost. Having once known the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can never unchristianize ourselves,—we can never divest ourselves of our responsibilities, or think of occupying the same level as the heathen. It has been said that every good man whom we meet with in life adds to the sense of our responsibilities. His holy walk and conversation are beams of light reflected from Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, and they show us not only what we are, but what we may hope to be. Let it then be our aim to rise

higher and higher in the knowledge of God our Saviour; and He shall make us drink of the river of His pleasures; for with Him is the fountain of life, and in His light shall we see light. Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9.

Ver. 20. *Ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζαβὲλ ἡ λέγουσα καὶ ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν, καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμούς δούλους, πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα. But I have* this *against thee, that thou sufferest thy wife Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and both teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.* The above reading, *τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζαβὲλ*, is found in both the Alexandrine and Vatican MSS. and in many Cursives besides. Why it was not adopted by the Revisers is not clear, especially as, in the side note, they observe, "Many authorities, some ancient, read, '*thy wife*'." Although this reading is not found in the Sinaitic MS. it is received and approved by Tischendorf, in preference to the Textus Receptus, *τὴν γυναῖκα*, *the woman*. Archbishop Trench considers the authority for the insertion of *σου* after *τὴν γυναῖκα* insufficient; yet here are two of the oldest MSS., many Cursives, the Syriac Version, and several of the Fathers in favour of it; and Bishop Wordsworth has adopted this reading as the correct one. (See Greek Test., Rev. ii. 20.) The verb *ἐᾷς*, *thou lettest alone*, is found in three old MSS., but *ἀφεῖς*, *thou sufferest*, is in the Alexandrine, Vatican, and Codex Ephraem Syri. The sense, however, is unaltered, whether we adopt the one or the other of these words. *Ὀλίγα*, *a few things*, is a corruption of the text and seems to have been brought down from ver. 14. The only point of textual criticism which the verse under consideration involves, is as regards the pronoun, *σου*, after *τὴν γυναῖκα*, which would necessarily limit the latter to the Angel, or Bishop of the Church in Thyatira. If the *σου* were omitted, the *τὴν γυναῖκα* would have an inde-

finite application, or at least it would be difficult to decide whether there was then in the Church at Thyatira a woman of the name here mentioned, or whether she was a symbolical Jezebel. It would be a very severe rebuke to the President of the Church in Thyatira to have his wife called by the name "Jezebel," if that was not her real name, since there is not in the whole of Old Testament Scripture, a more abominable character recorded. Facts sometimes are stranger than fiction, and it may have happened that the wife of the presiding Angel, instead of being a helpmeet, was a hindrance. Whoever she was, she claimed to be a prophetess, and by a false spiritualism, to lure the people of God into the same gross sins as those committed by the Balaamites, or Nicolaitans. Pretending that libertinism and eating of idol meats were indifferent, and overruling the authority of the Angel of the Church by an assumed spirit of inspiration, the woman, Jezebel, was to the Church in Thyatira what the wife of Ahab, the literal Jezebel, was to the weak-minded king and the people of Israel. She was the great seducer to idolatry in the later history of Israel; and as the worship of the Phœnician Astarte, or Venus, was accompanied with the grossest impurity, her name became the synonym of all that was debasing and profligate. It is hardly allowable to regard "the woman Jezebel," of Thyatira, to be a myth, as Dean Alford supposes, when he states that "the woman Jezebel represents not a person, but a sect, as the feminine in Hebrew is often used collectively to express a multitude. In that sense the idea conveyed would be that a number of false prophets were united, or formed into a sect in Thyatira, for the express object of influencing that Church in the direction of sensuality and idol meats, in the same way as a strong-minded wife would exercise her power over her husband, and that "Jezebel" is the concrete form in which this idea is expressed. There is not the shadow of a foundation for such a notion, for throughout the entire Epistle to the Church in

Thyatira, a single individual is clearly kept in view; and there is no more reason for regarding "Jezebel" here as the personification of a sect, than there is for doubting the historic character of the Churches themselves. She occupies, in the Church at Thyatira, a similar position to that of her prototype in the Old Testament. The latter was daughter of Ethbaal, king of Zidon, who was also priest of Astarte, and who gained for himself the throne by the assassination of his predecessor Pheles. Rawlinson says that Jezebel was great-aunt to Pygmalion and Dido, and this may account in some degree for her fierce and sanguinary character, and for her determination to establish the gods of her country in the kingdom of Ahab.[1] She was "swift to shed blood," and it was natural to expect that, from such parentage, she could not but be cruel and depraved. The worship of the true God was not totally given up until Jezebel brought in her Canaanitish gods, and cut off the Lord's prophets. To Baal a temple was built in Samaria, and a grove was made to Ashtaroth. Through her influence, idolatry was everywhere, like a plague spot, infecting and polluting the land; and after the memorable decision on Carmel, and the slaughter of her priests, she was filled with terrible rage, and threatened reprisals of the fiercest character. There are no bounds to her fury; and if Elijah can be discovered, soon and sudden will her vengeance be wreaked upon his head. When women hate, they do it thoroughly, they never do it by halves.

> "Aut amat aut odit mulier, nihil est tertium."
>
> "A woman either loves or hates, she knows no medium."[2]

Her whole life was spent in promoting the worship of her gods, and probably she herself was a priestess of the Phœnician Aphrodite. Jehu speaks of her whoredoms and *witchcrafts* (2 Kings ix. 22); and perhaps it is to the scene, when, with painted face and tired head, she looked out of her

[1] See Pulpit Comm. *in loco.* [2] Publius Syrus, B.C. 44.

palace window, for the last time, trying to lure or to lull the avenger, that the female Antichrist of Thyatira most closely corresponds to her elder prototype, and most keenly points the rebuke administered to the Angel of that Church. The "woman Jezebel," was doing the work of her historic namesake in seducing the people of God to immorality and idolatry; and the Angel of Thyatira was so weak that, like Ahab, he took no steps to prevent her, but rather encouraged her in her sin. History often repeats itself, and human nature was just the same in the first century as it had been a thousand years before, with this difference, that as the light of the gospel was diffused, men's responsibilities became increased. Sad must have been the influence that was at work in Thyatira. If one had but knowledge, the "Prophetess" taught that there was no sin in eating things offered in sacrifice to idols, and that the filthy conversation and impurities of the heathen were indifferent in themselves; and there was no need of any Christian enduring martyrdom rather than be guilty of these practices. Such infamous teaching was calculated to extinguish the very name of Christianity, when inculcated by professing Christians; for if those who had espoused Christ's cause were to indulge in the practices of the heathen, what better were they than the heathen themselves? On the contrary, they were infinitely worse; for, pretending to know the pure precepts and practices of Christianity, they were sinning against light—their conscience was seared as with a hot iron, and the last state of such persons was worse than the first.

It is rather unusual to find women in the Church of God corrupting the faith and morals of the people. They have been, on the contrary, the first to receive the truth, and the most devoted followers of our Lord. Indeed, no encomium in the New Testament is equal to that which Christ pronounces upon her who poured the ointment on His head:

"Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. xxvi. 13). Is not the woman of Canaan extolled for the greatness of her faith, and were not pious women last at the Saviour's cross, and earliest at His grave? We may therefore regard "the woman, Jezebel," as an exception to the rule, and look upon her perverseness and apostasy as an isolated case, where the love of pleasure, and the friendship of the world, induced her to make shipwreck of the faith. The censure here falls directly upon the Angel, or Bishop of the Church, as he is charged with permitting Jezebel to lead astray "the Lord's servants." By the word, δούλους, here we are to understand the whole body of the Church; and while the leaven of malice and wickedness was doing its work, there was no effort made to counteract it. Now He, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," cannot tolerate religious indifference. Indeed, one of the weightiest curses pronounced upon Meroz in the time of the Judges was for this very thing. "Curse ye Meroz, said the Angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (Jud. v. 23). Meroz had done nothing amiss. It had taken no part in the struggle against the enemies of the Theocracy—it showed that its heart was not sound; and by this very neutrality which it disclosed, it was virtually guilty of apostasy.

It was so with the Angel of the Church in Thyatira. Under his eyes there was unsound teaching, and the members of the Church were being drawn gradually away into heathen practices, yet there was no warning voice, no protest raised, no effort made to stem the current which was bearing souls to ruin. The opportunity of bearing testimony for Christ had come and gone, and it could not be brought back again. How earnest should we be in taking advantage

of seasons of usefulness when within our reach, so that the reproach of apathy may not fall upon us; and that if any wanderer, through our feeble instrumentality, may be brought back, we may possess the joyous assurance that "he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

Ver. 21. *Καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ· καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. And I gave her time that she should repent; and she is not willing to repent of her fornication.* God is long-suffering, and slow to anger. He willeth not the death of any sinner. But often the forbearance of God is abused, and because punishment does not immediately come, it may be thought that it will never come. It was so in the days before the flood; it will be so in the days immediately before the Second Advent. If the flood is to destroy the earth, Noah, a preacher of righteousness, is commissioned to warn the disobedient during one hundred and twenty years. If Sodom and Gomorrah are to be overthrown, Abraham intercedes, and angels are sent to bring Lot and his family outside the doomed cities. If Nineveh is ripe for destruction, Jonah is sent to give the alarm: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." And we cannot forget that over impenitent Jerusalem, Jesus wept, and in accents of the most inexpressible tenderness, exclaimed: "How often would I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but ye would not!" When Jezebel had been given space for repentance, she was unwilling to repent. She seemed hardened in sin—the conscience, which had been at one time tender, was now indurated—hard as the nether millstone, and, like the thermometer when frozen, would no longer give any indication of impressions. She had first grieved the Holy Spirit, then resisted His promptings, and now she had quenched the

Spirit, and had done despite unto the Spirit of Grace. What was now before her but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation that should devour the adversaries?

"She was not willing to repent." How hardening is the influence of sin! Like Ephraim, she was joined to her idols; let her alone. If God saves men, He will not save them against their wills. There is no iron law of necessity compelling them to be saved, whether they will it or not. There is a possibility of receiving the grace of God in vain, of falling from the most hopeful condition, if by watchfulness and prayer we do not constantly keep our eyes on Him from whom cometh our aid. When space is afforded for repentance, and no repentance comes, like the condition of the barren fig-tree, the soul must wither and die. Every delay, every arrest of justice mercifully vouchsafed, seems to say, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel?" God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, men unconverted, men who have lapsed from grace, men who have received the grace of God in vain.

On this side of the grave there is always room for repentance. Let it not be said that an unconverted man should not be told to repent and pray. How is the Spirit of all grace to be obtained but by asking God for it? (Luke xi. 13). Was not Simon, the sorcerer, told by St. Peter to repent of his wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him? (Acts viii. 22). So also with those who have left their first love. It is quite true that the Christian life is a warfare, and by grace we stand; yet this grace never destroys the perfect freedom of man as a moral agent. St. Paul was apprehensive to the last lest, while he preached to others, he himself should become reprobate. We know that nothing external can pluck the soul out of Christ's hand, but we may by our wilful perversity

and abuse of God's choicest gifts against Himself do what no outside force can effect. We are not machines or automata; and we are therefore called upon to look diligently lest any of us fail of the grace of God. We are to be ever watchful, for while we may be able to say, "I know in whom I have believed," the Christian's shield has a reverse side, on which we may read: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Our profitable companion to the gate of heaven is repentance, for if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves. Let it never be said that they who leave out repentance preach the gospel. It may be the gospel of man, but it is not the gospel of the Grace of God. It is gross Antinomianism, a treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing (Heb. x. 29). Let us never forget from whose lips those words came, words of love as they are words of warning of coming danger: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 3). Jezebel was not *willing* to repent. The will is the rudder of the soul. It either steers the ship into the wished-for haven, or drives it on shoals and quicksands. Blessed Jesus, thou "who holdest the helm and guidest the ship," make our wills subservient to Thine; so shall we be willing in the day of Thy power, and follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.

Ver. 22. *Ἰδοὺ, βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην, καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλῖψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς. Behold, I cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works.* Temporal sins bring temporal chastisements. Although, in this dispensation, temporal rewards and punishments are not the rule in the administration of God's providence, as it was under the Jewish economy, still we are not to suppose that there are no temporal punishments inflicted here, and no rewards attached to virtuous conduct.

Sin and punishment are linked too closely together in this world to permit us to ignore the connexion between cause and effect. There is sufficient evidence to warrant us in believing that there is verily a God who judgeth the earth, and yet we do not see that Divine administration so fully exercised as to forbid us to look for a final adjustment of wrongs and inequalities, as well as a perfect recognition of well-doing in a future state. God is pleased in His love and mercy to chastise the sinner while He hates his sin, in order that he may be roused to see the danger of his ways, and be led to repentance. No chastisement is for the present joyous, but grievous, yet afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby. It was for this object the offending Corinthian mentioned in 1 Cor. v. 5, who had been excommunicated by St. Paul, was delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord. The chastisement was from the Lord, that he might not be condemned with the world; or, as Bishop Wordsworth expresses it, "God in His mercy sends *κρῖμα*, a *judgment*, in order that he may escape *κατάκριμα*, *condemnation*." The expression "delivered unto Satan," implies that all physical evil is due to the influence and agency of Satan, and that, as by excommunication, all the channels through which the grace of God's Spirit flows, are closed, the sinner is given over to the service of the master he preferred to God. Yet it is a source of comfort to know that God does not finally leave the offender in that position, but being thus chastened, repentance is awakened, in order that he should not be punished with the world. So again we read in 1 Cor. xi. of those who profaned the Supper of the Lord by partaking of it after indulging in idol meats, and in their *Agapæ*, feasting and drinking to excess. St. Paul speaks of them as drinking the cup of devils or false gods; and for their guilty profan-

ation of that Holy Sacrament, they were visited with sickness and death. They had treated the ordinance of God irreverently, as common food, and in their very reception of that Sacrament, it became the instrument of their punishment.

Nor are we here to see merely an ordinary affliction in the case of that woman Jezebel and her adherents, but a temporal punishment, an immediate visitation of God, in token of the Divine indignation against sin. In Isaiah xxviii. 19–21, we find an express statement of the visitation which came upon the degenerate descendants of Ephraim—when it is said: "The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim; He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act." It has been remarked that crime and punishment grow out of the same stem—that punishment is a fruit that, unsuspected, ripens within the flower of the pleasure that concealed it. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." If we have given way to the indulgence of sense, if we have followed the bent of our unrenewed wills, it may be expected that the seeds we have sown will produce fruit after their kind: and though sometimes the punishment may be long delayed, yet it is certain eventually to come.

The threatening applies not only to Jezebel, the false prophetess, but also to her adherents. They were to be visited with sickness, unless they would repent of her works. Some have conjectured that the words, *βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην, κ.τ.λ.*, are in allusion to Ahab (1 Kings xxi.), as lying down upon his bed, and turning away his face in childish grief, because he could not become possessor of Naboth's vineyard, and of Jezebel his wife coming to him, and soothing his troubled spirit; but there can hardly be any connexion between the two cases. The design of casting the false prophetess on a bed, by which we would understand, a bed of sickness, as distinct from one of sinful

indulgence, was in order to awaken her to a sense of her real state, and lead her to see how fearful the evil was into which she and her followers had fallen. She and her companions were to be visited with sickness, and great tribulation, but it is added—

Ver. 23. *Καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ· καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι, ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἐρευνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας· καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν. And I will kill her children with death; and all the Churches shall know that I am He who searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.* There is clearly a distinction between those mentioned in the former verse as her adherents and followers, and her children in ver. 23. Are *her children* to be taken in a figurative sense, or a literal? There is no good reason why we should depart from the literal meaning in this instance. Those connected with her in ver. 22, were to be cast upon a bed of wasting and languishing sickness, to bring them, if possible, to repentance; but her children were to be killed with death. She was to be left childless in the world. Just as the child which was born to David after the death of Uriah was removed by death as a punishment for David's sin; so here the children of Jezebel were to be cut off, and any joy and pleasure which they might have brought her in after life, of this she was to be for ever deprived. In the Old Testament we frequently read of the children being cut off on account of the iniquity of the parent, for example, in the case of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, his posterity were swept away from the face of the earth. Of all the evils which could befall a Jew, none was greater than the loss of posterity, and the cutting off a family was considered a retribution of great severity. For Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites, we are told, his seven sons were hanged before the Lord (2 Sam.

xxi. 8, 9). If temporal visitations do not follow now the individual crimes committed by open transgressors of God's law, it is not that these are less sinful, but because "judgment to come" is more clearly revealed now than it was under the Law ; and Christianity enjoins forbearance, and teaches us to leave retribution to Him who has said, "Vengeance is Mine ; I will repay."

God expressly says, He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him ; which implies that wicked parents may live to see their posterity of these generations, and recognise their own sin in the punishment of their offspring. Zedekiah, for his sins, saw his sons and the princes of Judah slain before his eyes (Jer. lii. 3, 10). Even the heathen had a presentiment of retributive justice following the track of the wicked, for after the fall of Carthage by the Romans under Scipio, Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, who regarded the Carthaginians as descendants of the Canaanites, exclaimed—"I recognise the doom of Carthage,"—feeling that the curse of Canaan rested upon the race. Now we may consider Jezebel, for her wickedness, punished in seeing her children perish before her eyes, these children being the fruit of her sin, while she herself and her adherents were cast upon a bed of sickness, pain, and sore tribulation. While alluding to the punishment of the godless, it may be asked, Does God visit the sins of the parents upon the children, who may be brought up to lead a godly life? We sometimes see God's people deprived of their children—one by one removed from their sight—and they themselves left behind to have their gray hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave. This cannot be viewed as penal, although it may appear so. It is the paternal act of Him who is our Father in heaven, and whose purposes are now hidden. It may be to check some rising spirit of pride, or overweening fondness, or pre-

vent our attachments getting too deeply rooted in the world. For the children, it is well with them. They are taken away from the evil to come, they escape the corruptions of the world, and its manifold temptations; and they beckon us onward and upward to follow them to their happy haven of rest in the bosom of Christ.

Some have thought that the words, *τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς*, are to be understood of those who were deceived by Jezebel, and that the *τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς* of the previous verse are to be taken as descriptive of those who were joined with her in her confederacy of wickedness—the promoters of her wicked teachings and corrupt practices: but it is not clear how the less guilty should be punished with death, while the more prominent abettors of her wickedness should only be visited with sickness. Upon the whole, the explanation which regards "the children" as the literal offspring of Jezebel has more to commend it than any metaphorical interpretation, especially as such retributive justice might naturally be expected, from the wicked and abandoned life of that woman (or *τὴν γυναῖκα σου*) Jezebel.

καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι, κ.τ.λ., and all the Churches shall know that I am He who searcheth the reins and hearts. The attribute of searching the reins and hearts—the one the seat of lusts, the other of the affections—belongs to God. Christ here claims it as His prerogative; therefore, there is here a direct proof of Christ's Divinity. The mode in which all the Churches should know that Christ was Divine was by the exercise of judicial authority and penal discipline not only in regard to that woman Jezebel, but all those connected with her. If the Church at Thyatira had fully recognised Christ's Divine authority, it would have been likely to ponder before it ran into such a course of profligacy. Many of the evils which existed in that Church might have escaped detection by the eyes of men; but there is

One "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," who will come, at times, "with a rod," who will both "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts," and expose and call to repentance those who are living in error themselves, or causing others to follow their pernicious ways. When He inflicts chastisement on those who continue to go on still in their wickedness, then shall all the Churches acknowledge that He is Omniscient, that He needs not that any should testify of man, for He knows what is in man. The sins of men, though they may seem to pass for a time unpunished, shall not escape His righteous judgment, but will frequently bring upon those who commit them, swift destruction. Not only the Church at Thyatira, but all the Churches, should be possessed of this evidence of Christ's Divine character. The leaven of wickedness which was working at Thyatira had been spreading abroad. Its effects were felt throughout Asia Minor—indeed we have noticed that, at both Pergamum and Ephesus, the germs of Antinomianism were already being developed. Under the pretence of knowledge (*γνῶσις*) and liberty (*ἐλευθερία*), men were practising the most impure deeds. They professed to understand all mysteries, and by their high sounding pretensions they led astray the unwary; but Christ, by visiting them in punishment, would show to the Church at large, whether the pretended mysteries of the Gnostics, or the power of the Divine Saviour should be the more worthy of their regard. He would show them that He only knows the hearts of the children of men, and can turn them as He does the rivers of water whithersoever He wills. It is always a sign of decay where Churches are tolerant of evil—while they permit it to continue in their midst, and do not reprove it. Very often it is with Churches in this respect as with individuals, who say, Am I my brother's keeper?

What have I to do with the conduct of others—to their own Master they stand or fall? This is a mistaken view, for are we not members one of another? The Church is constituted as a family; and surely no parent would permit one of his children to go astray, and lead others in the downward path, without reproving him. Christ's title in this passage, "the Searcher of hearts and reins," is put in contrast to the assumptions of those who, in ver. 24, are spoken of as conversant with the depths of Satan. They professed to know secret mysteries, and by this pretended knowledge, they beguiled unstable souls to their ruin. Christ here expresses His own Omniscience, as knowing alike the secret heart of man and the hidden purposes of God, and that not merely by the exercise of observation of events occurring around Him, but by "knowing in Himself," by "perceiving in His Spirit," the thoughts, motives, volitions which were being formed within, and were afterwards to become developed in actions. The sin of the transgressors was certain to find them out—what they were sowing would undoubtedly be reproduced in a harvest of evil, and all the Churches would have evidence that, while He was full of tenderness and compassion to the weakest member of His Church, He would in no wise clear the guilty.

καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἑκάστῳ, κ.τ.λ., *and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.* He here reproves the false prophetess and other teachers of Thyatira who had been relying solely on a profession as sufficient; who had the γνῶσις, and taught that it made no matter as to the life. They were heretical in doctrine and licentious in their lives. They taught that "they who believed in Christ were free to live as they pleased, that men would be saved by His grace and not according to their works, and that nothing is good by nature, but only by institution."[1] Some of these Antinomian

[1] *Iren.*, i. 20.; *Euseb.*, ii. 13.

teachers affirmed that they were perfect; that no one, not even St. Paul, or St. Peter, could soar to the heights of their knowledge, and that they were above all power, and were free to do all things on account of their emancipation from thraldom, and could not be apprehended or even observed by the Divine Judge.[1] Good works they do not seem to have taken into their reckoning. Make a profession, get knowledge; and libertinism, if you are only adepts in this γνῶσις, may enter into your religious system! No wonder that, under such teaching as this, the Searcher of the reins and hearts would say—"I will give to each of you according to your work." Works are not meritorious before God. By doing them they neither entitle us to receive grace, nor do they procure our acceptance before God. If we make them the foundation of our hope, they become not only worse than useless, but positively injurious. "They are," says an able writer, "the offerings which guilt makes under the pressure of fear to the God whom the conscience dislikes, because of His holiness."[2] But while in the wrong place they are injurious, in the life of a Christian they are necessary. They are the fruits of faith, and spring necessarily from it; and when they thus spring from the life of the soul, they are both pleasing to God and profitable to men. It is absolutely sinful to keep works in the background in connexion with the Christian life, for those who are created anew in Christ Jesus are created unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

There is a rule of recompense laid down here from which we learn that, though we are not saved by our works, we shall be judged according to our works—that the measure of the reward, and of the retribution, shall depend upon what our works have been. While the Christian loves the truth

[1] *Iren.*, i. 13, quoted by Wordsworth.
[2] Arnot, *Laws of Heaven*, etc.

for the truth's sake, and the service of his Master in heaven for the sake of that perfect moral Being whose he is, and whom he serves, he shall have his reward in the approval of God, and in the lasting communion he shall enjoy with Christ and the blessed saints in heaven. But there is another side to this: the wicked, the godless, and profane—they too shall have the requital of their evil deeds. The object they have kept in view they shall reach, and they shall therefore have it altogether. What they have laboured for, toiled for, paid for, they shall have; but it will be only a fading and fleeting thing at best. Whatever object men seek apart from God can never give them satisfaction. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." The work that springs from an impure or selfish motive will only be disowned by Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. If the motive which inspires it be unworthy, it will be like the dead fly which causes the most precious unguent to give forth an ill savour. Let the tree be good, and the fruit will be good. Whatever is not of faith is sin: and no matter what may be the pretexts or outward appearance, if actions do not proceed from a regenerate and renewed heart, they are, in the sight of the Searcher of hearts, of no value, but, like counterfeit coin, which, though possessing the image of Cæsar and superscription, is intrinsically worthless. What are we doing for God, for Christ, for the Church, for the souls of men? The rule of the judgment will be Matt. xxv., "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Ver. 24. *Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσι τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ, ὡς λέγουσιν, Οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος. But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many*

as have not this teaching, who did not know the depths of Satan, as they say; I cast not upon you any other burden. Although in the Church at Thyatira, many had been led into error, and been deceived by false teachers, yet there were some, at least, who had remained faithful, and to them there are words of encouragement and approval addressed. The seeds of Gnosticism were sown in the Apostolic age, and they had been germinating and maturing towards a harvest of evil, at the end of the first century, when St. John wrote. These Gnostic teachers, to whom the Apostle refers as having boasted that they knew the deep things of God, were claiming superior wisdom to others. The depths they were desirous to fathom were on the subject of evil—*πόθεν ἡ κακία*; whence did it come? How account for its existence? If God evolved the world out of nothing, it must have been perfectly good, and evil could find no place in it. There must have been some opposing influence or principle; hence dualism, by which they understood all good to exist in God, and all evil in matter.

God could not come into contact with matter, except by self-limitation, and when He would manifest Himself, he must only do so by a series of successive emanations, which become feebler on each occasion, until at length He is brought in contact with matter, and creation follows[1] There is then a constant warfare between matter and spirit, and one of "the depths" is to know how to keep the higher nature pure, while brought into close connexion with matter. Keep the material part of man in subjection, practise austerities of the severest kind, and if the material frame is wasted, the spiritual part of man will rise to its true and proper level. But this does not satisfy, as it only affords a palliation for the evil it affects to cure. The Gnostics alluded to in

[1] See Bishop Lightfoot, on *Coloss. Heresy*, p. 76.

the address to the Church in Thyatira adopted a different principle. They had no recourse to asceticism. They would have no mortification of the flesh. They would courageously enter the kingdom of Satan, and they would show utter indifference and contempt for worldly things by following their impulses unconstrained. What, say they, have we to do with matter? we may use it or not, as we think fit. It is no great exercise of self-denial to be superior to pleasure by avoiding it, but the triumph is to enter the domain of evil, to give way to every corrupt passion, to let the body indulge in every vice, and yet preserve the spirit pure and undefiled. This is to know "the depths," to be fully informed of Satan's devices, and to conquer Satan with his own weapons—to continue in sin that grace may abound! But so far from Satan being conquered, the more they knew and had experience of his devices, the more strongly did they rivet the chains which bound themselves to him, and the more effectually did they become the slaves of corruption. They had fathomed the depths of wickedness, and how could they pretend to be pure? It was not the "deep things of God" they knew, but those of Satan.

We read of the *synagogue* of Satan in the address to the Church at Smyrna; the place where Satan has *his seat* in the Message to the Church at Pergamum; but here the Gnostic libertines are spoken of as knowing the *depths of Satan*. "Let us do evil that good may come," seems to be the spring of their actions; and the greater the depth of evil that they reached the higher their claim to perfection. But there was amongst this godless community, a remnant according to the election of grace. As in the time of Israel's most marked corruption, there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed the hand to him, so there were not a few who kept their garments clean, and protested against the fearful depravity of these followers of Satan. They had not

got any insight into the working of this Satanic delusion, which applauded knowledge, but ignored holiness ; they seem to have turned a deaf ear to its erroneous teaching, and now our Lord addresses Himself to them. As regards them, He says, "I cast not upon you any other burden." Any other burden than what? Was it the burden of sorrow they were enduring on account of the perversity and malignity of these men among whom their lot was cast? Or rather was it the burden, if such a term can be used to designate it, of Christ's easy yoke, and their maintaining a firm profession of the faith once delivered to the saints, in the face of that open, reckless impiety which prevailed? They did not know these so-called depths as the followers of Jezebel had known them—they did not know them to be depths of Satan at all —they had no experience of them—they had, in the abounding iniquity, kept themselves pure, and looked upon the errors of the age with grief and sorrow, while they had no power to correct them ; and in standing aloof from these wicked teachers who were, under the pretext of a false freedom, the very slaves of corruption, they had, in some degree, been witnessing for Christ. On them the loving Saviour would lay no other burden than that of protesting against evil, and keeping themselves undefiled.

The word rendered *burden* is *βάρος*, not *φορτίον*, the one meaning an oppressive burden which may be dispensed with as occasion requires, the other, a load which each one is expected to carry. Christ says, You are called upon to bear a burden ; and, however difficult to endure, you are not to have it removed, but, on the contrary, in sustaining it you are to consider yourselves favoured and fortunate. In this sense, the word, *βάρος*, occurs in Acts xv. 28, 29, where abstinence from these very sins of which the followers of Jezebel had been guilty is spoken of as a *βάρος*—"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these

necessary things;" and, in all likelihood, our blessed Lord had the decree of the Council of Jerusalem in view, when He spoke of putting on the faithful in Thyatira no other burden. The words which precede, "I cast upon you no other burden," ὡς λέγουσιν (as they say), are construed by some as referring to the Christians of Thyatira themselves in their testimony against the followers of Jezebel; but they would appear to be more appropriately applied to the evil workers in the Church, who professed to fathom the depths Satanic. "But I say unto you," in the first clause of the sentence, would require, "as you say," in the latter part of the verse, if the words referred to what was spoken by "the rest in Thyatira," in contradistinction from the Gnostic libertines, who pretended to sound the deep things of God, which the Spirit had revealed to them. These devotees of Jezebel gloried in their shame, and boasted that they could indulge in all the lusts of the flesh, and maintain their spiritual nature perfectly pure, that they could enter the domain of Satan and despoil the strong man armed, of his armour, but after a peculiar fashion, by assuming the character of Satan, and then fighting against him, which looks very like what may be understood as Satan reproving sin! The vaunted knowledge of these false teachers was such that they pretended to instruct their votaries in "depths" that Apostles knew nothing of, that human plummet could not fathom, for even the lake of fire they pretended they could sound, and some of them considered they could receive no injury from worshipping the devil himself! (See authors quoted by Wordsworth in *Greek Testament*, vol. iii. p. 178.)

Ver. 25. *Πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε, κρατήσατε ἄχρις οὗ ἂν ἥξω. But that which ye have, hold fast till I come.* They are to hold fast the form of sound words which they have already received, permitting no one to rob them of it. They are to

keep the faith pure and undefiled, and earnestly contend for it, not allowing anything to be added to or taken from what has been once delivered to the saints. They are to be witnesses for the truth, and in bearing their testimony they are not to shrink from the difficulties and dangers which may come across their path. When the Lord shall come they shall be recognised by Him as His faithful servants, and as they have been faithful in a few things they shall become rulers over many things. Some have thought that our Lord here refers to the *burden* of which He had been speaking, and which the Church at Thyatira—at least the portion of it that did not know the depths of Satan—was called upon to bear; but this would be to prolong the existence of the Church at Thyatira to Christ's coming, and to imply that these two features of Gnostic heresy which had been disfiguring the Church—namely idol meats and libertinism—were to be the direct marks of apostasy against which the faithful were to protest until that event. To warrant this exposition, the latter clause of ver. 24 is added to ver. 25, by which the passage is made to read: "*I will put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have already; hold fast till I come.*" The semicolon, however, after the word "already," separates the words, "hold fast till I come," from what goes before, and would necessarily require us to insert some word to complete the sentence. What were the faithful to hold fast? They might bear a burden, but there is no sense in which they could hold it fast. The holding fast must therefore be the maintenance of sound doctrine and of a holy life. The gift of grace which Christ had bestowed upon them, the faith of the gospel, the witnessing a good confession, a life hid with Christ in God, in opposition to a life of sin—these were to be maintained and held firmly to the end. Just as at the Council of Jerusalem the Apostles enjoined upon the early Christians the necessity of abstaining from certain things

which had been in themselves detrimental to the well-being and safety of the Church (Acts xv. 28), so here the same injunction is given; but in addition to the negative abstaining from self-indulgence, there is also the positive precept to "hold fast that which ye have." A like precept is given to the Church at Philadelphia (Rev. iii. 11). There is no restraint put upon Christian liberty more than the gospel enjoins. It is only when that liberty becomes a cloak of maliciousness that it must be kept in proper limits, for free-will, under such circumstances, becomes the slave of every corrupt passion, every sinful desire, and every base and wicked deed. Hold fast, ye faithful in Thyatira, like the tempest-tossed voyager to the ship. Cling to the Crucified One amid all the storms of life. Let hope in Him be the anchor of your souls; then earthly cares and crosses may come, but they will vanish like foam on the crested wave; and having Christ in you the hope of glory, you can be assured of the truth of the declaration that "all things are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22).

Ver. 26. *Καὶ ὁ νικῶν, καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν. And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations.* The promise is here made to the victor in the battle of life, and especially to him who would steadfastly resist the seductions of Jezebel. The works alluded to and spoken of as "My works," are put in opposition to the works of darkness, or those Satanic depths which the Gnostic teachers had been shamelessly glorying in. Works, which spring from faith and love, and which are the expression of willing obedience and service to Christ, seem to be implied, and according to these will the reward be bestowed; for although we are not saved by our works, we shall be judged according to them. There is a connexion observed between the works

and the reward. The temptation presented to the Church at Thyatira was to heathen practices. The danger the faithful had to guard against was their being drawn into the depths of Satan. They had perhaps a want of firmness and determination to openly avow themselves followers of Christ; hence the promise addressed to those who would be faithful to the end—not merely to him who would begin to run well, but to him who would patiently endure to the end. It is not sufficient to put on Christ's armour; we must be His faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end.

The promise is only to the persevering, earnest, and valiant soldiers of the Cross, who were uninfluenced by the fear of man, and who were not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. To them should be given power over the nations. There is an allusion here to Ps. ii. As in that Psalm Christ's victory over the nations is spoken of; so here that of His people in virtue of their union to Him is assured; as He, the King set upon the holy hill of Zion, should reign until all enemies were placed under His feet, so should His people share the honour and victory with Him. The kingdom of Christ had been wrongly interpreted by the Gnostic heretics as a reign of sin and sensuality; but those who were now subjects of the true kingdom of Christ, which consisted not in meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, would ultimately, when Christ should return to establish His kingdom upon earth, have true power over the nations, as enjoying Christ's dignity, and becoming partners with Him in His crown.

Ver. 27. *Καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ· ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται, ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ Πατρός μου. And He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter are broken to shivers; even as I have received of My Father.* The nations that would continue hostile He

should rule with a rod of iron. The word "rule" is ποιμανεῖς, in the Septuagint in Ps. ii.; in the Hebrew it is "break," and the latter part of Ps. ii. 9 would indicate that this was the idea of the Psalmist; but there may be a double allusion, that of breaking in pieces, and pasturing, or shepherding, descriptive of judgment meted out to the adversaries of Christ, and love and tenderness to those who would be prepared to hail Him as their king. But the shepherding here is the result of that ἐξουσία, that lawful dominion with which Christ would invest His faithful followers; and in this dignity and honour which His saints should possess would be seen their complete triumph over the heathen, whether open persecutors, or false teachers, such as Jezebel, who would undermine, and lead astray, Christ's followers. The power with which His people should be invested would be no usurped power, δύναμιν, such as the votaries of heathen superstition exercised; it would be, on the contrary, the power which cometh from Christ, who has all power in heaven and earth. Over His own, Christ will, through His authority delegated to His saints, have a gentle and loving rule, but the crook of the shepherd will become a rod of iron in Christ's hands to dash to pieces His enemies. Archbp. Trench considers the threat for the nations is one of love, and that Christ shall rule them with a rod of iron, so as to make them capable of being ruled with a sceptre of gold—that the ruling here is disciplinary, or remedial, not punitive. It may be so; but we cannot doubt that when Christ shall come, judgment shall be meted out to His enemies, as well as mercy to His faithful followers and friends (2 Thess. i. 8, 9; 2 Pet. ii. 9; Jude 13, 15).

ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ Πατρός μου, *even as I have received of My Father.* Immediately before Christ's ascension, He declared, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18). By that we understand all media-

torial power. As God He is absolutely Omnipotent; but in His character of Godman, as the reward of His sufferings and deep humiliation, God hath highly exalted Him to the throne of the universe, from thenceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool. He is now seated on His Father's throne, and will continue to exercise Mediatorial power until all His people for whom He travailed in soul shall be gathered in; afterwards this kingdom shall be delivered up to His Father, and He shall then assume the crown of all the earth, and be recognised as King of kings and Lord of lords. "I appoint unto you," He says, speaking to His disciples, "a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me" (Luke xxii. 29). At Christ's resurrection His royalty began; then it was the promise had its fulfilment, "I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Then we see fully realized what had long been shadowed in symbol, "I have set My king upon My holy hill of Zion." He who was arraigned before the bar of Pilate, taunted with being a king, and crowned with thorns, is now exalted with great triumph in the heavens, and because He is thus honoured, such honour shall be the privilege of all the saints. "Know ye not," says St. Paul, "that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. vi. 2). Only at Christ's Second Advent shall the saints possess the kingdom (Dan. vii. 18, 27). Of the wicked it is said, "Like sheep they are laid in the grave, death shall feed on them, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning." Christ has a triple crown; He has it by right of creation; He has it by conquest; and He has it also by inheritance. All earthly rule is but the shadow of His throne, and all earthly crowns borrow their dignity and lustre from Him. Satan claimed power not only to hold, but distribute the kingdoms of the world according to his will, while he had not one foot of earth to bestow; but God has given

to Christ ἐξουσίαν, lawful authority, to rule over the kingdoms of this world, and ultimately to make them the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ.

Ver. 28. *Καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν, and I will give him the morning star.* What is meant by this? Does it simply mean, I will give unto him Myself, who am the Morning Star? (Rev. xxii. 16).

We must look for the meaning of this promise as something more than a mere intimation that to him who should be found faithful Christ would give Himself, for even now Christ dwells in the hearts of His people (John xiv. 23; xvii. 23; Col. i. 27). The promise is yet future, just as that of the context respecting the power over the nations is future, and it relates to some privilege to be enjoyed in Christ's kingdom. The morning star is not that which gives us the light of day; it is only the harbinger of day; and, in this view, the words might mean, To him that overcometh will I give a share in My kingdom at its first manifestation. The star is always symbolical of royalty, and the morning star may denote the royalties of Christ which would be shared with, and imparted to those who had been faithful to Him amid the darkness of surrounding error, and had borne witness to the truth, and upheld the honour of His name. If there is any reference to local circumstances—and it is probable that in all the promises attached to the faithful in the different Churches, there was some contrast presented which more than compensated for the worldly advantages and enjoyments offered to the false professors—the contrast may be to the Sun god. Thyatira was the city of Apollo, the heathen deity who represented the sun, and whose head was surrounded with a crown of rays, emitting a dazzling light; and it was an appropriate and intelligible promise which the followers of Christ were cheered with—that Christ, who calls Himself the "Morning Star,"

should give to them a better than Hesperus, or Phosphorus, a star that should not set, but shine on for ever, filling the New Jerusalem with its light, and the Universe with its glory.

In the beautiful words of Bishop Wordsworth, whose note on this promise is here quoted—"'And I will give unto him the morning star,' which puts to flight the night and ushers in the dawn; an emblem of the victory of Light over darkness, and of the triumph of the children of light over those false teachers who are like wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 13), and therefore a fit emblem of Him who is the Dayspring from on high (Luke i. 78), and brings life and immortality to light, and whose appearance at the last day will be like the morning star of eternity, ushering in that glorious day which has no evening (Rev. xxii. 16); and who will grant to His faithful servants to shine like the stars for ever (Dan. xiii. 3)."

V.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS.

Κεφ. γ'.

1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῇς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ.

2 Γίνου γρηγορῶν, καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν· οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ μου.

3 Μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας, καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. Ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἥξω ἐπὶ σὲ ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῷς ποίαν ὥραν ἥξω ἐπὶ σέ.

4 Ἀλλὰ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν, ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

5 Ὁ νικῶν, οὗτος περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς· καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς· καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Πατρός μου, καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

1 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

2 Be watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have not found thy works fulfilled before my God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

4 But thou hast a few names in Sardis, which did not defile their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

V.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS.

Chap. iii. 1–7.

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῇς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. And to the angel of the Church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

Sardis was the ancient capital of the kings of Lydia. It was situate at the foot of Mount Tmolus, on the banks of the famous Pactolus, whose waters we are told deposited golden sands, which attracted, in days long passed away, many a foreigner, and were said to be the source of the wealth of Crœsus. Its present name is Sart, a miserable village containing a few hovels, standing in an unhealthy desert, which is the only remnant of the perished splendour of the illustrious city of the kings. Long before the foundations of ancient Rome were laid, was Sardis a royal city. Its first historic king was Candaules, B.C. 716, and its last was Crœsus. It was taken by storm, B.C. 546, by Cyrus, one of whose soldiers, seeing a Lydian descend by steps cut in the steep rock on which the citadel stood, entered by that way, leading the Persians into the Acropolis.

It was on that occasion that Crœsus was taken prisoner and loaded with fetters, and sentenced by Cyrus to be burnt

alive. Crœsus had taken the opportunity at some previous time to show Solon, the Athenian philosopher, his treasures, and, vaingloriously proud of his riches, asked him, Who did he think was the happiest of men? The philosopher spoke of one who, happy in his family, yet of humble position, had fallen for his country in the moment of victory. He next spoke of two dutiful sons who, after winning the prize in the public games, had drawn their mother to the temple, and there died with their honours fresh upon them. Crœsus was quite disappointed at not being told that a man possessing such wealth must be the happiest of men; but instead of that, Solon warned him of all the changes of fortune that might come this side the grave, and added, "Call no man happy until his death." When the fire that, by the mandate of Cyrus, was to consume Crœsus, was being kindled, he cried loudly three times, "O Solon! Solon!" Cyrus having inquired the meaning of this exclamation, and being told the story of the warning Crœsus had received from the philosopher, and probably feeling that it was possible that some change of fickle fortune might befall himself, ordered the flames to be extinguished, and had the captive brought before him, who made his submission to Cyrus, and afterwards became his faithful friend and follower. Sardis was in the zenith of its splendour in the time of Crœsus. Its trade and commerce far surpassed those of any of the neighbouring kingdoms, for the kings of Lydia had made it the centre of trade in wool and woollen fabrics; it was famous also for its bronze (electrum), and it was here the art of dyeing, for which Thyatira was remarkable, was first invented. When the city fell into the hands of Cyrus, he added to it, and made it the seat of the Governor of Asia Minor. In the reign of Darius it was burnt accidentally by the Ionians, which act so incensed the Persians that it led to the invasion of Greece, first by Darius, and afterwards by

Xerxes, his successor, who made Sardis his headquarters, before he began his disastrous march on Greece. Although the Persian power was overthrown in Greece, Sardis never regained its independence until the time of Alexander the Great, who invaded Asia B.C. 334, and defeated 600,000 Persians under Darius, by 30,000 Macedonians. Sardis opened its gates to Alexander, who gave back to its inhabitants their Greek laws, built a temple to Jupiter Olympus, and restored the city to its early prestige and splendour. For a lengthened period it remained united to Greece, until the time of Antiochus, King of Syria, by whose army it was invested, and after a siege of more than a year, taken by storm.

After Antiochus had been defeated by Scipio, Sardis passed into the hands of the Romans. In the reign of Tiberius it was destroyed by an earthquake, but, by order of the Emperor, it was again built and brought back to its ancient glory.[1]

Sardis is not mentioned in the New Testament except here. We have, therefore, no ecclesiastical record respecting the founding of a Christian Church in that city. That there was one when St. John wrote is clear, and that whatever it had been at a previous time, it was then in a state of spiritual decay, well nigh bordering upon extinction. It is not open persecution that is complained of, nor is it heresy in faith; it is the keeping up the name of religion, while the life, the spirit and power, are gone. "She glories in being alive," says Ebrard, "but is dead, because the truth which she once embraced with subjective heartfelt zeal is now regarded only as an objective treasure for the head; because an awakened Christianity is wanting in her, she makes only masses of Christians." It is therefore apposite that the Head of the Church should address her as "He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars."

[1] See Tristram's *Seven Golden Candlesticks*, pp. 93–98.

The Church needed spiritual life, and the Holy Spirit is the "Giver of Life," and the bestowal of the Spirit is in the hands of Christ. This procession of the Holy Ghost from both Father and Son, which the Eastern Church will not admit, is here undoubtedly implied. It is the Holy Ghost in His sevenfold plenitude and power, whose office it is to impart spiritual life; but the gift of the Spirit is Christ's. "If I depart," says our blessed Lord, "I will send Him unto you" (John xvi. 7). "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father . . . He shall testify of Me" (John xv. 26). Christ may, therefore, be here said to have the seven spirits of God. In the days of His flesh the Holy Spirit was given to Him without measure; now He is the giver of that Spirit to quicken His Church. He will not go back to those days of His humanity and say—"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek" (Isa. lxi. 1). He is now the Possessor of that Spirit, and He can bestow it to quicken whom He will. He has "the seven stars" also—who are the Angels of the seven Churches—those who minister in holy things, the instruments for which the sevenfold influence of the Spirit is needed. Whatever life there is in the Christian ministry must come from the possession of that Spirit, just as each planet has no inherent light, but receives its light from the sun, the great centre of the system. And if there is an absence of that Spirit's power, there is not only danger of loss to the Church, but personal danger of wandering away from the true centre. Like the lamps of the sanctuary which were fed with the oil that flowed through the golden pipes, if the ministry is to be successful, the grace of the Spirit must be sought for and obtained. It is comforting to those who are but "earthen vessels," to know that the Spirit's fulness, and the instruments into which that fulness is imparted, are in the

hands of Christ. And to that Church in which there was but a faint spark of life still lingering, that was no better than "smoking flax," these words with which the Head of the Church addresses it, must have conveyed a welcome note of encouragement, considering the languid condition of the Angel, and the spiritual feebleness which characterized those who were under his charge.

What was the cause of this moribund state of the Church in Sardis? The people of Sardis were idolaters—they worshipped the mother goddess, Cybele. The fragments of the temple that was erected to her honour still remain, and there are two stately columns, with Ionic capitals, which are fully 60 feet high and about 6½ feet in diameter, whose bases are deeply imbedded in the rubbish that has fallen down from the citadel. Her worship was of the most debasing character, and orgies like those of Dionysos were practised at the festivals held in her honour. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions; and when we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity, with early associations, and companionships, and connexions, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the Church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether, and swallowed up in the great vortex.

Then again, Sardis has been alluded to as a city of great wealth and magnificence. Worldliness may have put forth a power, even greater than heathen superstition, to make the Church lethargic. Like the vampire, which, by the gentle agitation of its wings, lulls its victim to sleep, while in the meantime it is extracting the very life blood, so material prosperity was exercising a marked influence in producing spiritual torpor, and making men forget God. The Church

which had begun in the Spirit, now seems to have been ending ingloriously in the flesh; the body was there, but it was ghastly pale, for the spirit had all but fled.

"Demas hath forsaken me," said St. Paul, "having loved this present evil world." See that young man coming to Christ in seeming earnestness, and asking the most important question which could concern an immortal spirit—"What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" When told to part with the engrossing love of mammon, the most crooked of all the spirits that fell, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He bartered his immortal soul for the love of gain; he crossed the Saviour's path once for all, and passed away into the gloom of night. Like some stately vessel outward bound, with sails set and favouring breeze, for the moment he was hopeful of reaching his wished-for haven, but the giddy whirlpool of worldliness soon absorbed his soul, and he perished miserably in its depths.

And from the statement in ver. 1, respecting the Church in Sardis, it would seem as if it had a high reputation, as if it stood well in the view of other Churches; "Thou hast a name." What is the use of a name? We may deceive the eye of man, but there is One unto whom all hearts are open, and from whose scrutiny nothing is hid—Him we cannot deceive. "We be Abraham's children, and were never in bondage to any man," was the boastful self-confidence of the Jews, at the very time they were groaning under Cæsar's yoke, and the spiritual bondage of a debased and hypocritical priesthood. The Church in Sardis clung on to the withered branches of a tree which had no root, and was sheltering itself under the shadow of past attainments. There was no public testimony borne to the truth; nor do we find the "steadfast few" contending earnestly for the faith, in opposition to false teachers, as was the case in other Churches. There was a quiet self-complacency, which allowed every-

thing most valuable and praiseworthy to drift like sea-weed on the bosom of the tide. Now moral indifference is not far removed from open apostasy, and some of the heaviest censures recorded in Scripture are directed against that calm easy neutrality, which will put no difference between the man that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not. "Curse ye Meroz," said the Angel of the Lord, "Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof." Why? What has Meroz done? Nothing. It sat still while Barak with his ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun were doing battle with the overwhelming forces of Jabin; and so it is said, "Because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (Judg. v. 23). One of the worst features of character described in the Book of Psalms is this sitting at ease in Zion. "Neither doth he abhor any thing that is evil," is the record respecting an individual who is placed by the Psalmist in the category of the wicked. There was a pretentious appearance about the Church of Sardis; but it was hollow in the extreme, unsubstantial, as the baseless fabric of a vision. It had a reputation for what it was not. In the eye of the world there were to all appearance green leaves, but these only concealed the barrenness of the tree, and deceived the unthinking multitude; but the all-searching eye of the Lord detected its unreal character, and we hear His verdict: "Thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead." In mercy He does not seal its doom in perpetual blight, as he did the barren fig-tree. He does not say, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." If there is still lingering about its root some faint sign of life, He will not extinguish the little that remains, however weak, but will strengthen it, so that there may be eventually fruit to His glory in the salvation of souls.

It is very possible if Sardis had endured the same fiery trial which some of the other Churches sustained, there would

not have been such a noted absence of spiritual life. It has been remarked that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," and it cannot be doubted that the Church of God was never more vigorous than in those early days of suffering when Paganism and persecution were endeavouring to obliterate its existence from the earth. Better far that Sardis could have said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."

Ver. 2. *Γίνου γρηγορῶν, καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν· οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ μου. Be watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have not found thy works fulfilled before My God.* The words in Greek have greater force than in our English version, as they convey the idea of the Church not merely being more watchful for the future, but of *becoming watchful*—of entering upon a duty that had been neglected. Become as one who watches, is addressed to the Angel. You have been called to spiritual life—"Arise, and shine, since your light is come." This torpor and spiritual paralysis which have been stealthily creeping in, will issue in the extinction of the Church's life. Shake it off, and become a true watchman on the walls of Zion.

Become watchful! applies equally to the Church. As sentinels, "Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong." As guardians of the lamp of life, see that it never gets dim, and that it may pass unsullied to those who come after you. The duty of watching implies detachment from the life that now is, and preparation for that which is to come; it is the keeping Christ in His sacred person and in His work ever in view, and acting under the impression that we are in His presence. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. The world has a depressing influence; its breath tends to rust

and bedim the soul and render it unfit for active exercise. So forcibly does this appear, that even amongst our Lord's disciples, when He was entering upon the last stage of His sorrow and suffering, there was an absence of watchfulness that necessitated the warning—"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

The cause of this spiritual stupor in the Church at Sardis was doubtless owing to that inglorious ease which characterized its members, who seem to have had no contention for the faith, and to have suffered no persecution from either open foes or false brethren. Carried away by life's smooth current, the Church lost all sense of witness-bearing, and was drifting fast into perilous waters, where rocks and quicksands were on every side.

Watch then, for dangers and temptations threaten, perilous alike to faith and duty. Watch against sin and error; watch against self-confidence and the illusive glare of a high reputation, which, like the apples of Sodom, might be beautiful to outward appearance, but inwardly full of corruption and deceit. Watch for Christ, lest, coming suddenly, He find you sleeping.

καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die. What were the *τὰ λοιπὰ*? persons, or things? The use of the neuter gender is not decisive, for a mass of individuals in a paralysed, or dead condition, might well be represented by the *τὰ λοιπά.* The fact of "a few names" afterwards occurring in ver. 4, would turn the balance in favour of *persons* being here understood. If the "things that remain" are not to be taken in this sense, we are then to understand by them graces, or qualities, which had been allowed to become all but extinct by the apathy and indifference of the members of the Church at Sardis. Both Trench and Stier regard the *τὰ λοιπὰ* as individuals, "an inert, dead mass and majority, called 'the

rest,' in opposition to the awakened kernel of the Church." Just as our Lord said to St. Peter, "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," so here when thou by repentance hast become truly alive, watchful, and strong, then strengthen the remainder which are at the point to die, and who shall die if there be no effort made to infuse spiritual vigour into them.

The exhortation here is similar to that given in Ezek. xxxiv. 4: "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force, and with cruelty, have ye ruled them." The very exercise of imparting strength to the weak and sick of the flock would have a reflex influence upon the Angel of the Church, who had shared in the languishing condition of His people. There were still signs of life in "the remainder," but they were very feeble; and before the Angel of the Church could bestow vigour upon them, it was necessary that he should rouse himself, and seek from the great Head of the Church that strengthening power which He only could bestow. He could then exercise the gifts and graces he had received, and in awaking from spiritual slumber those who are here spoken of, he should be found going on from strength to strength. While watering others, his own soul should be watered. It is only those who have received spiritual life themselves who can impart any spiritual benefit to others. The dead may bury their dead, but they cannot by any process of exorcism restore the dead soul to life: hence the call to become watchful, and not permit the expiring embers of a Christian profession to become extinct in Sardis. How gracious and merciful is our blessed Redeemer. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He will first woo them to repentance by calls of love; but, if there is no response, he will have recourse to sterner

measures. He seems to say, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Is Ephraim a dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still."

οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, for I have not found thy works fulfilled before My God. The word, *πεπληρωμένα*, implies that prescribed duties had been allotted to the Angel of the Church to perform, and these had not been completed. He had not been a faithful labourer for Christ, yet he stood well before His fellow-men, and even before the various Churches; but he could not stand the scrutiny of Him who hath the seven Spirits of God. He was weighed in the balance and found wanting. God has appointed to each of us a work, and he bids us "to go forth to our work and labour until the evening." How many there are who waste their time in trifles, and, when it is too late, find to their sorrow and dismay, that they have neglected to discharge the obligations imposed upon them by the Great Master. The work of faith and labour of love have been engaged in with half-heartedness, and spiritual languor has often taken the place of earnest witnessing for Christ. Especially is this to be deplored in those who are set apart to the office of the ministry—who begin in the Spirit, and who depart from the holy commandment delivered unto them. St. Paul had three great desires, which should ever influence every true and faithful Christian:—1st, to know Christ; 2nd, to magnify Christ; and 3rd, to be with Christ. In this consist the whole aim and end of the Christian life.

The Apostle could say when he came to the close of his career and was about to exchange his natural life for the martyr's crown, "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith." It is only faithfulness unto death that will fit us for the crown of righteousness. It is possible to discharge ex-

ternal duties with perfect regularity, to be most punctilious in attending to the exact letter of the commandment, while the power of religion is unfelt and unheeded; but this superficial empty formalism cannot escape the observation of Him who searcheth the heart. If there is no zeal for God, no mortifying of the flesh, no deadness to the world, no purity of life, no outward activity in seeking for the wandering sheep of Christ's flock, no copying of the example of the good Samaritan in works of benevolence and mercy, it is clear that the spirit of religion has fled; and the profession, however respectable it may appear before men, is no better than "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." It is to be feared that, in this age of secularism, the least service we can render to God, while we maintain our respectability before the world, is more frequently sought to be discharged by us, than the consecration of body, soul, and spirit, to Him who bought us with His precious blood. Can it be that cold, heartless service will commend us to that Master whose meat and drink were to do His Father's will and to finish His work? Are there not many standing idle even at the eleventh hour in the market place, and yet hoping to be no worse off in the end than others? Their life was a dream, their light was an ignis fatuus, and only when their sun was beginning to sink in the west, did they begin to rouse themselves from their stupor, and feel how far below their high calling they had lived. To such the words of a great writer[1] fitly apply—

> "Be good," my friend; "and let who will be clever;
> Do noble things, not dream them all day long;
> And thus make life, death, and that vast Forever,
> One grand sweet song."

Ver. 3. *Μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας, καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. Ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἥξω ἐπὶ σὲ ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῷς ποίαν ὥραν ἥξω ἐπὶ σέ. Remember*

[1] Rev. Charles Kingsley.

therefore how thou hast received and didst hear, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. In these words our Lord would recall the Church at Sardis to a sense of duty. "Remember!" Ephesus was called upon to remember from whence she had fallen, namely, from the early love of her "espousals in the day of the gladness of her heart;" but Sardis is reminded of her reception of the truth, and the manner in which she first heard it. It is not *what* she first heard, but *how* she heard that she is called upon to remember—not the matter, but the manner—not that she had corrupted the truth, but kept it in a cold, heartless, indifferent way. There is no charge against Sardis for conniving at, or tolerating, false teachers, or erroneous doctrine; it is altogether as regards the absence of spiritual life that the censure upon that Church falls. It is because she had forgotten how, with holy zeal and heart-felt love, she had first received and heard the truth; how with great joy, as in Samaria (Acts viii. 8), it took possession of the hearts of her people, and produced happiness and peace, that memory is appealed to in order to bring those "times of refreshing" vividly to view, so as to stir up again the warmth of early profession, and renew the vigour of spiritual life. Were these things dreams, or were they blessed realities? Like the goodness of Ephraim, were they as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, which passeth away?

Highly privileged Church in Sardis! You have seen what many prophets and kings have desired to see, and have not seen—to you has the word of this salvation been sent. It came to you at first with demonstration of the Spirit and power. Think then what you once were, and let this reflection stimulate you to regain that happy state from which through your indolence and indifference, you have fallen. But her members are enjoined to hold fast what they origin-

ally received and heard, and to repent. As St. Paul addressed Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee, guard, through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. i. 13, 14); so here they were required to go back to first principles, to hold them fast, and repent. Our Lord does not allow them to settle down on the lees of a bare speculative Christianity, or flatter themselves with the hope that He that had begun a good work in them would not suffer them to fall away. On the contrary, He deals with them as He finds them. He will not leave them in a state of hypocrisy, retaining the name of a profession without the power. They must "hold fast," as one grasps a life buoy when struggling for life amid the surging waves; they must "repent," acknowledging before God their sad departure from grace given," deploring their declension, and seeking that He would restore unto them the joy of His salvation, and make them glad with the light of His countenance. And can we doubt that even to Sardis, sunk in deep spiritual torpor, there will be the response from the Church's Head, "I will heal your backslidings, I will love you freely"? (Hos. xiv. 4).

ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, κ.τ.λ., *if therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*" These words are associated with Christ's Second Advent, yet they are here applied to denote His coming in special judgment on the Churches. Twice in the days of His flesh Christ spoke the same words, (Matt. xxiv. 42, and Luke xii. 39), but they pointed then to the great event which the Church is still looking forward to in high expectancy. They left a marked impression on the early Church, for they are referred to again and again by the Apostles Their design was to keep up watchfulness. Our Lord had just told the Church at Sardis to "become watch-

ful." He here shows what will follow in the event of His injunction being neglected. To continue in deep spiritual slumber as they were would tend to their utter extinction. Sleep has always been the opportunity for the subtle adversary to gain advantage. "While men slept the enemy sowed tares," and while the Church is in the condition of Sardis, we may look for the most disastrous results. It was not false teaching, nor perversion of the truth, that produced that self-complacency and security which were so perilous to Sardis; but rather the absorbing power of the world, which had made its people forget God. To some who are so engrossed, Christ comes as he did to the rich man in the parable: "This night, thy soul shall be required of thee." To others He comes and awakes them kindly, with the words in which St. Paul paraphrases Isa. lx. i:—"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." How careful should we be to keep before us this Christian duty of watchfulness! Watch against sin in its beginning. "Obsta principiis." Watch against worldliness: while duty points in one direction, convenience takes another; and frequently, like two forces acting at right angles, we take the middle course.

Watch for Christ; whether in His Second Advent, or in His nearer and more immediate judgments upon Churches and individuals. As regards the Church at Sardis, His coming, which is here threatened, was more disciplinary than penal. He proclaims the stealthy and sudden mode of His approach, whether in persecution, or distress, or loss of goods or reputation. The Greek proverb, "The feet of the gods are shod with wool," expressed the subtlety and surprise with which their judgments were executed, and conveyed the lesson enforcing constant preparation and watchfulness. We may believe that the warning given to Sardis had the desired effect: for Ecclesiastical History tells us of a flourishing Church in Sardis in the second century, with Melito as its

Bishop, a man eminent for learning and piety, who, to assure himself of the completeness of the Old Testament Canon, took a journey to Palestine, and gave the result of his inquiries in a most interesting Epistle. He also was the first who wrote a commentary upon the Apocalypse.[1]

Ver. 4. *Ἀλλὰ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν, ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν. But thou hast a few names in Sardis, which did not defile their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* In the addresses to the other Churches, we find the good that was in them first spoken of by our Lord, before He took notice of their failings and faults; but it is otherwise here. He first lays bare the wound that was fast spreading, pours in oil and wine, and would heal the spiritual malady; yet if the Church will not rouse itself, and make some vigorous exertion, it must be prepared to expect the doom of the unprofitable servant. It must have been encouraging and hopeful to the Angel of the Church at Sardis to be informed that, even there, there were "a few names;" and it must at the same time have conveyed a rebuke when he thought of what had been already said regarding himself personally: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead." The name is indicative of the person, as we find in Acts i. 15; Rev. xi. 18. The Angel of the Church had a name—it was only a name—but there were some in the Church over which he presided who had more than a name; they had the reality. They had not the form of godliness merely, but they had also the power.

The insertion of *ἀλλὰ* (but) at the beginning of this verse, and the omission of *καὶ* (even) are in accordance with the readings of three of the oldest MSS., and have been adopted in the Revised Version.

[1] *Euseb.*, iv. 26.

"The few names" are here to the credit and honour of the Church; "the few things" in connexion with the Church of Pergamum were against it, and to its condemnation. He who was the Angel of the Church does not seem to have known "the few names," just as the Prophet did not know the seven thousand in Israel, who had not bowed their knees to Baal. God has His people where we know not. There, in the midst of declining zeal, and dying love, were to be found a faithful "few," according to the election of grace, who had kept their baptismal covenant, and remained Christ's faithful soldiers and servants, and determined to do so till their life's end. The Church of God, compared with the mass of unbelievers, has always been but a little flock; it has been in the world, but not of it, and has kept a clear line of separation as a witness for Christ. The names spoken of here are not those of high distinction—of persons who had left a mark in the world by deeds of valour or patriotism. They are, on the contrary, those who silently and steadily were holding forth the Word of Life in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation; and active and unobtrusive, were like some broad and deep river, calmly flowing on to the ocean, almost unobserved, but for the verdure which clothed its banks. Never has the Church of God been so low that there have not been a faithful few. It has had its vicissitudes like other institutions; but, unlike them, it has survived those shocks which hurled down dynasties, and overthrew kingdoms; for God was in the midst of it.

There was a Noah in the Antediluvian world—a preacher of righteousness, and one who walked with God—an Abraham in Ur and a Lot in Sodom, a Job in Uz and an Obadiah in the Court of Ahab; and in that period in which with Malachi, the prophet, the volume of the Old Testament dispensation closed, there were, amid the darkness, degeneracy, and corruption of the times, a remnant that

feared the Lord, and spoke often one to another, and God entered their names in the book of His remembrance, and promised they should be His in the day on which He should make up His jewels. God has never left Himself without a witness in the world, nor shall He till the end. We are disposed sometimes to ask, "are there few that be saved?" This question was asked our Lord by one who was inquisitive, but He did not answer it. During His personal ministry, there were but few attracted to Him, and He frequently spoke of "the strait gate and the narrow way" leading to life, while the way to destruction was wide and broad; yet we cannot draw from this fact the deduction that few shall be saved ultimately. As sin has abounded, grace does much more abound: and we can hardly suppose that He, who came to destroy the works of the devil, shall fail in seeing the travail of His soul in myriads of redeemed and rejoicing saints. In that glorious vision of the Apocalypse, the Apostle saw a great multitude that no man could number, of all nations, kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands. In all things Christ must have the pre-eminence; and so far from few being saved, there shall be multitudes numerous as the sand on the sea-shore, or as the stars of heaven. The very silence of our Lord to the question which had been proposed on this subject, was a rebuke to curiosity; and it was also a tacit admission that the question was to be answered negatively; for if the answer had been in the affirmative, our Lord could hardly have refrained from expressing it, especially as the knowledge of that fact would have been a stimulus to duty, and would have tended to promote anxious self-examination and a holy life. When we think of the multitudes that die in early life—perhaps half the world's population die before attaining manhood—when we think of the millions that have died in

Christ from Apostolic times to the present, and the still vaster numbers that shall reign with Christ during the thousand years millennial glory, which we are looking forward to, and waiting for, in earnest hope—when we think of the myriads of heathen who have never known Christ, and yet have "the law written in their hearts," and shall be judged by that law—we may, without indulging in any vain or speculative theories, respecting a remedial process after this life, between death and the resurrection, believe that the numbers saved shall infinitely exceed those who shall be lost. It would be a pleasant hope, if we could only entertain it, that there is even now a refining process going on whereby the old leaven is being purged away, and, through which, those who died without repenting of their sins have an opportunity of yet regaining the bliss, that, by their wilful wickedness, they forfeited; but there is no warrant in Scripture for such a view, except what may be inferred from our Lord's preaching to the spirits in prison, and which passage, in 1 Pet. iii. 20, may be interpreted in different ways.[1] We know God willeth not the death of sinners—He desires that all men should be saved—His mercy is over all His works—Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, to seek and save the lost; but to speculate upon what may occur after the period of man's probation here has ceased, is only vain presumption. When our Lord wept over Jerusalem, He said the things belonging to its peace were then hidden from the eyes of its people—He recognised no further time of trial to make amends for past neglect. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after death the judgment."

ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν, κ.τ.λ., which did not defile their garments. These few in Sardis are said not to have defiled their garments—they kept themselves from the impurity into

[1] Compare Rev. i. 18.

which others had fallen, and which St. Jude has spoken of as "the garment spotted with the flesh." From Joshua[1] filthy garments were taken away, as a sign that his iniquities were removed, in order that he might be clothed with a new garment. Ye who have put on Christ in baptism must be careful how you maintain your Christian profession, by not getting stained in your intercourse with the world, through lust and sin. At baptism, the persons to be baptized were clothed in white in token of the purity of their life, which they undertook to observe and maintain. Archbishop Trench distinguishes between the "white raiment" of the next clause, and the undefiled garments here. The latter he calls "the garment of grace" put on at our entrance by baptism into the kingdom of Grace; the former, "the garment of glory," put on at our entrance, by the resurrection, into the kingdom of Glory. Stier considers the garments which the few of Sardis had not defiled as symbolizing the righteousness of Christ received by faith, which only in the few had exerted its full power unto that sanctification which is valid before God, and which He looks for as fruit from a tree. There may be an allusion to the wedding garment of the parable which those invited to the supper were required to put on. They had named the name of Christ, and they had departed from iniquity. Their religion had not been merely in name; but their whole course of life was like that of the Apostle who said, "To me to live is Christ." Having put on Christ, they crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. No longer their own, but bought with a price, they glorified God in their bodies and spirits which were His. They were separated from "the world that lieth in the wicked one," and distinguished by zeal for God, love to one another, and purity of life. They were "the salt of the earth," preserving the Church in Sardis from utter cor-

[1] Zech. iii. 3–5.

ruption, purifying themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. Like the palm-tree in the desert, the leaves of which are always green, whether the baleful simoom blows, or sand-clouds scatter dust around, the faithful few in Sardis were always vigorous, and flourishing, and true to their Christian profession.

καὶ περιπατήσουσι μετ' ἐμοῦ, κ.τ.λ., *and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* This is the promise given to those who had not defiled their garments. It clearly refers to the future state; to the enjoyments and blessings and dignities of heaven. The faithful few had walked with Christ here; they had been followers of the Lamb whithersoever He went, not lagging behind in base distrust, or going before in proud presumption, but doing His will and yielding themselves as a willing sacrifice to Him. Archbp. Trench observes, "Here are many promises in one. The promise of life, for only the living walk, the dead are still; of liberty, for the free walk, and not the fast bound; of beauty, for the grace and dignity of long garments only appears to the full when the person wearing them is in motion; therefore is it that the Scribes desire to walk in long robes" (Luke xx. 46).[1] The white robes of the Sardian few are indicative of purity and victory. Those who came out of the great tribulation had "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." We could not now gaze upon the ineffable glory of our Ascended Lord. Perfect correspondence with Christ is needed for perfect life. Before His saints can "see Him as He is," their bodies must be transfigured like to His glorious body. They must possess the same properties and faculties, and their eyes the same power of vision, before they can stand in the dazzling splendour of His presence, or be admitted to complete and intimate communion with Him.

[1] Archbp. Trench, *Epist. to Seven Churches*, p. 169.

As in nature there are certain substances which are incompatible, and will not coalesce, so in order to perfect fellowship there must be mutual adaptation. "How can two walk together unless they be agreed?" They must be of one mind, and of one heart. There shall be no misgivings of His love, no doubts as to His Providence; for then every veil will be removed, every cloud dissipated, and they shall see His face in righteousness, and be satisfied when they awake in His likeness. Perfect purity will then characterize those who have kept themselves here unspotted from the world. The sky shall have no cloud, the day shall have no night, "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing, shall flee away." Whatever they may have been here—"though they had lien among the pots, they shall then be like a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold"—now faultless before the throne, washed, justified, sanctified; "redeemed from among men, firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." There the Tree of life has no Tempter. Heaven's door will shut them in, and they shall go no more out. The service of Christ will be their constant employment, unbroken by exercise and unimpaired by time. No moth shall corrupt those heavenly garments, no rust shall corrode that burnished gold; nothing then shall enter in that defileth; but perfect purity, and love, and life, shall be the fruition of those who are Christ's for ever.

ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν, *for they are worthy.* There are two senses in which this word may be taken. "Thou art worthy to take the Book," etc. (Rev. v. 9). No one is worthy in this sense; no one is worthy in the sense of *merit;* for what have we that we have not received from Him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift? This expression here does not mean that the few faithful of Sardis were deserving of heaven by their own works, but that there was a fitness—they had been

made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. They had that spirit and temper which qualified them for the enjoyment of the heavenly world. They were adapted to it. It was the element in which they could live, the atmosphere which they could freely breathe. They were not like as if they had gone to a strange land, where they would hear a language they could not understand. They had come to their home, for which they were longing, and had been preparing. They had been growing in grace; their character was daily becoming more heavenly; their spirit, their feelings, their desires, had been gradually rising above earthly things; and there was a fitness, on their part, for entering into that Presence of perfect purity, and holding constant and close communion with Him.

The redeemed in glory take no merit to themselves. They cast their crowns before the Saviour's feet, and they ascribe their salvation unto Him. "Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." It is possible for us to deserve well of one another, to bestow favours, and confer obligations; but in the relationship in which we stand to God it is otherwise. We are His creatures—it is He who hath made us and not we ourselves—and we can give nothing to God that is not really His own. The highest archangel owes his life and preservation to God, and he possesses nothing that is properly his own; and what the bounty of God has given must surely belong still to God. All our powers, possessions, services, we are obliged to consecrate to God, and when we have done all things commanded us, we must still say, "We are unprofitable servants." Of merit we have none, for a creature meriting of the Creator would be impossible. If we had merit, we could save ourselves without the intervention of Christ; but as Christ only has merit, and we have none,

He alone can save us. The worthiness, therefore, of the few faithful of the Church in Sardis is not to be taken in the sense of merit, but in that of fitness, preparedness, meetness, or adaptation, for that world of light which is illuminated by the presence of God and the Lamb. And is not this the effect of the redemption purchased by Christ? As St. Augustine has said respecting the Church: "Fœdam amavit, ut pulchram faceret"—"He loved her foul, that He might make her fair." He came to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, that He might present His Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. He who has secured our pardon for us has also provided our fitness for heaven. He has not only reconciled us unto God, but He has made us meet for the inheritance.

If one part of salvation was effected, and the other part unprovided, there would be no hope of reaching the Heavenly City. By His intercession, our daily infirmities, and weaknesses, and backslidings, are overlooked; God and man are brought into communion, and by the continual application of Christ's blood, every breach is healed, where one might apprehend separation. Preparation for heaven then must be begun here. Our wills, inclinations, desires, actions, must be in harmony with God's revelation. The bud must be formed here, if we are to look for the blossom in heaven. Life is a discipline, a work of preparation; and if we are to have the encomium bestowed upon the faithful few of Sardis, we must cultivate holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Heaven's enjoyment will consist in eternally walking with God, in being in constant contact with Deity. There must then be a perfect accord. "Let that mind be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Ver. 5. *Ὁ νικῶν οὗτος περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς· καὶ*

οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς· καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Πατρός μου, καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.* In the Revised New Testament the word, οὗτος, is translated as if it had been οὕτως. Although the Revisers may have had authority from ancient MSS. for substituting οὕτως, yet, by the change the meaning of the passage is not rendered more clear. There is no doubt a repetition of the previous verse; but there is no description of the raiment in that verse which would warrant the οὕτως of the next. It is merely said "They shall walk with Me in white." He that overcometh—even he—οὗτος. He alone and no other, as Stier renders it, the same shall be clothed in white garments. White is the colour of heaven—indicative of purity, perfection, glory. Our Lord spoke of the righteous "shining forth as the sun" in the kingdom of their Father; and when He would give to His disciples a foretaste of the future world, which He did in the "Holy Mount," we are told His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as light. He was clothed with light as with a garment; His body had undergone such an apparent change as it was afterwards really to assume in His resurrection: and the promise here given to him who should overcome is not only that he should be clothed with the righteousness of Christ to enable him to overcome, but with that resurrection body which would be fashioned like to Christ's glorious body. The faithful few in Sardis had kept their garments clean; now they are to have raiment white and glistering, as the reward of their willing and devoted service. We know little of what the resurrection body of the saints shall be. It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but it is enough to know that our resurrection bodies shall be

fashioned like to Christ's glorious body: for we shall be like Him. In the two appearances of Christ after His ascension, first to St. Paul and secondly to St. John, we are told, in the one case, "there shined round about a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun," and in the other, the beloved Disciple describes the appearance, "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." The two angels which came to the sorrowing disciples after Christ's ascension, to allay their anxious thoughts, are represented as in white apparel. It would be in vain to contemplate the transcendent glory of the resurrection body, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality.

That there will be bodies, we have proved to us by Christ's body; and that there will be a place for these bodies is as clear from the fact that there is some place in the Universe where Christ's body is now. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." This does not mean that the resurrection body shall partake of the nature of spirit, and that the laws of matter shall have no application in this case; for we cannot for a moment doubt that Christ had a real human body after His resurrection. "Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have;" but Christ had power over the laws which regulate the condition of human bodies, and He could suspend them at His will, as He did before His death by gliding invisibly through the midst of His enemies, and, after His resurrection, by entering the room when the doors were shut. "The natural body," as spoken of by St. Paul, refers to the animal body now marred by sin, and compassed with infirmity, and this He contrasts with the resurrection body which shall be moulded by the spirit, and fitted to man's higher nature—a body in which the spirit shall predominate, and the animal soul shall be in abeyance. Here the body is such as is adapted to the animal soul—there the body shall be fitted to the capacities and requirements of the

nobler part of man's nature, and actuated and regulated by the spirit.

We cannot tell where the place of our future life may be. Heaven is wherever Christ is. It may be far away from earth, or it may be here. At least this earth, which was visited by the Son of God, where for thirty-three years He tabernacled in human flesh, and where He suffered and died, may be one of the "many mansions" of our Father's house; and where, after its purification by fire, the redeemed may enjoy the presence of, and hold perfect communion with their Lord. We do not know anything further than that we shall awake in Christ's likeness, if planted together in the likeness of His death. This may, of course, refer to spiritual likeness—like Him in the spirituality of our nature, like Him in holiness of character, like Him in dominion over the lower creation as at the beginning; but Christ's body is the pattern of what ours shall be—and this clearly implies a dwelling place, and a home, and a reunion.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,—not that the substance of flesh is denied this privilege, but flesh *as flesh*, with a sinful depraved nature, cannot be brought into contact with absolute purity. Our bodily frame must undergo such a change as will enable us to approach and hold intercourse with Him. When on earth He permitted His followers to maintain the most intimate relation with Him; but as soon as He assumed His glorified humanity he maintained communication by His Holy Spirit. And if there will be such a change wrought in the body at the resurrection as to fit it for intercourse with Christ, there will be a corresponding change in the soul. Perhaps the soul is now undergoing that educational process, in its state of separation from the body, that will qualify it for reunion with the glorified body; and, if this be so, we can understand in some degree why it is that many of our friends are taken

away, as we may consider, prematurely, since their early removal is only in order that they may be trained for a higher and purer sphere of existence, when "death shall be swallowed up in victory." All that multitude that St. John saw, and which he tells us no man could number, were clothed in white robes. They had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs—their warfare over, the great tribulation forgotten, now they rest in the Saviour's presence, awaiting the dawn of the First Resurrection.

The redemption of the body from the grave is that for which the groaning creation is waiting in earnest expectation. The souls of all who have died in Christ are still in conscious bliss, no individuality lost, but each maintaining a distinct personal existence. There is no warrant for entertaining the belief of what is called "*conditional immortality*." "Man," we are told, "is not immortal by the terms of his nature, but may become immortal if saved by Christ." Everywhere throughout Holy Scripture man is dealt with, and spoken of, as endowed with the gift of immortality. God is the only Being who has immortality by an inherent necessity (1 Tim. vi. 16); but in the case of man it is bestowed by his Creator. He who at first breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living soul, continues to breathe into each individual in the act of His creation a personal spirit, and has endowed it with the gift of immortality. There is by the very terms of man's nature, whether for weal or woe, an undying existence; and whether saved or not, whether believer or unbeliever, the soul is indestructible and immortal. The very heathen could, by the light of nature, understand this. They felt instinctively that all did not end at death. There were desires, hopes, fears, which gave presentiments of an existence after death, and which could

be explained by any materialistic theory of a mere animal existence, but which pointed to a coming immortality.

So Addison makes Cato say in his soliloquy :—

> "It must be so ! Plato, thou reasonest well :
> Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
> This longing, after immortality ?
> Or whence this secret dread, and inward horror,
> Of falling into nought ? Why shrinks the soul
> Back on herself, and startles at destruction ?
> 'Tis the Divinity that stirs within us :
> 'Tis heaven itself that points out an Hereafter,
> And intimates eternity to man."

Let us ask how it is that after the mere animal life has begun to decline, the spirit continues to rise to higher degrees of intellectual and moral power—as Goethe has put it—"The mental and moral activity which has lasted to the very moment of dissolution cannot be arrested by the death of man's outward husk, but must continue in some other form and sphere beyond it"? How is it that a God of justice could permit the balance of human suffering and sorrow to remain for ever unadjusted, and never be supposed to redress the terrible inequalities that exist in human life as at present constituted ? Our Lord has put the argument for the soul's immortality beyond dispute, when, in His reply to the Sadducees, on the subject of the resurrection, He says : God called Himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, centuries after these patriarchs had passed away. He did so when speaking to Moses at the burning bush. Now God calls Himself their God still. He would not do so if they had no existence, for He is not the God of the dead but of the living. He is not the God of that which has gone to nothingness. He is the God of beings who exist ; and it is added in Luke xx. 38, "for all live unto Him." And to make men's hopes stronger, to enable mankind to rest upon a basis which is infallible as God Himself, there is the

great central fact of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ had taught of "many mansions," of a prepared place; and He had assured His disciples if there was any doubt on these points He would have told them.

An earnest of future glory was given, when two visitors from the unseen world were present with Christ on the mount; but He established a glorious immortality by a fact, patent to the simplest apprehension, that beyond this visible world, a world unseen and eternal awaits us hereafter. The fact was verified by a sufficient number of reliable witnesses, and established in the face of the most violent adversaries, who used every endeavour to evade its force, and explain it away; but those who were witnesses of this great fact were prepared to sacrifice all they had, and even their own lives, rather than surrender the testimony which they bore to the reality of their Lord's resurrection. If Christ then has risen from the dead, if He has gone within the veil, if He is now in the great Holy of Holies, in the temple not made with hands eternal in the heavens, then we may be assured of our personal immortality, for over the gates of that temple may be found inscribed, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

Away then with the materialistic notion that death is the extinction of the soul. Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel. No longer are we left to grope our way by dim and uncertain guide-posts, or to make guesses as to the great Hereafter. Away, too, with the Pantheistic theory of an impersonal immortality; of the soul of man passing away into an ocean of boundless life, where it is lost to consciousness and personality. If morality is anything more than a name, if there is a living personal Christ in the universe, if there is accountability to God, then personal spirit must be maintained, and those marks of individuality which distinguish man from man must last for ever. If then I am endowed with personal immortality, and if this personal

immortality is maintained after death, is there not involved in this the idea of reunion and recognition? because, if individuality remains, there must always be that feature or mark by which one shall be distinguished from another. Of course, our feelings and affections will be different in heaven from what they are here. Whilst here, in greater or less degree, "self-love, the spring of motion, acts the soul." The love of God shall then be supreme, and, loving Him, we shall love one another. Overcoming, conquering in life's battle, we shall receive the crown from Him under whose banner we have fought. His best and greatest gift is yet to be bestowed. Now if we are His, He hath taken our souls and bodies, and joined them indissolubly to His own Divine Person. He is the Head, we are the members; but what we shall be when He shall transfigure our bodies with the splendour of a new life will only be manifest when, after life's storms, we are brought "to the haven where we would be," and where, on the Day of Redemption which is fast drawing nigh, we shall see His face, for "in His presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω, κ.τ.λ., *and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life.* All the Israelites who came up out of Egypt had their names entered on a muster roll, and each year the names of those who died were removed from the roll. This record was called, "the writing of the house of Israel" (Ezek. xiii. 9), or "the book of the living" (Exod. xxxii. 32); and those whose names were found inscribed in it were said to be written among the living (Isa. iv. 3). The same figure is here used to denote those who have been faithful, amid the faithless, in upholding the truth, and bearing witness to their Lord and Master. "This book," says Kiel, "contains the list of the righteous, and ensures to those whose names are written therein, life before God, first in the earthly kingdom of God, and then eternal life also.

Many have been curious to know whether their names were written in this book, and some have taken for granted that this was so, and have, by their abandoned and profligate lives, denied the Lord that bought them. No one has any claim to have his name in this muster roll, who is not cultivating holiness, who is not bringing forth the fruits of the spirit, and whose life is not characterized by "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report" (Phil. iv. 8). The world sees us, and we see ourselves, differently from the point of view in which we are seen by God. There are many now with high-sounding names in this world, and who are regarded by their fellow men as especially praiseworthy, whom the light of eternity shall make manifest as having been no better than the great mass of professors in Sardis, with only a name to live; and the names of such are liable to be erased from the Book of Life, if we can suppose them to have ever been recorded there. They may have been numbered among the Lord's true disciples; like Judas, in the Church of God, but not of it; and the nearness of communion with believing souls, and the glory of the light which brightened their path, will only enhance their responsibility, and add to their condemnation. There is no one who has ever been brought into the society of the people of God—the excellent of the earth—whose privileges have not been increased, and whose accountability has not been proportionately magnified.

We see only the appearance, but God sees the heart; and many whom we suppose to be in God's Book of Life, are not found written there, while some whom man would exclude from the heavenly citizenship, are the true and recognised denizens of the city above, whose Builder and Maker is God. They are unnoticed among men, for "the world knoweth us not"; they are registered in Heaven, for the Lord "knoweth them that are His." Indirectly this statement implies that

those who had been alluded to as having a name, as living and yet being dead, would be blotted out of the book of the living; and this throws light on a point which has given rise to considerable disputation, whether or not there is what is called *indefectible grace*—whether there are names now written in the Book of Life that may afterwards be erased from it. We cannot suppose that, in the secret purpose of God, any are written in the book of the living but those who shall enter into life eternal—"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal; The Lord knoweth them that are His." It is not consistent with the Omniscience of God to conceive of His Book of Life as being liable to erasures. He will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. ii. 4); and our Lord expressly told His disciples, speaking in reference to children, "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. xviii. 14). The gracious will of God is for the salvation of the human family; but man's perverse will rejects the counsel of God against himself, and is the efficient cause why he "receives the grace of God in vain."

Our Lord encouraged His disciples on their return from their first mission, by telling them not to rejoice merely because the devils were subject unto them through His name, but rather because their names were written in heaven; yet we can hardly think that, amongst the seventy, there may not have been some who, like Judas, forfeited their high privileges. Bp. Lightfoot, on Phil. iv. 3, says, "It is clear from the expression, 'blotting out of the Book' (Rev. iii. 5), that the image suggested no idea of absolute predestination"; and Bp. Wordsworth, on the same passage, says, "That this saying does not imply any assertion concerning the certainty of their salvation appears from Exodus xxxii. 32; Psalm lxix. 28; Revelation iii. 5, where names once written in the Book of

Life are represented as liable to be blotted out." The few in Sardis to whom the promise was given had not been satisfied with an inoperative faith, they had used all diligence to make their calling and election sure, they had taken up their Cross and followed Christ; and now the book of the living, in which God had enrolled them, would bear everlasting testimony before God, angels, and men, that they were worthy of a name and a place amongst God's sons and daughters. When the names of the world's heroes had perished from the register of time, theirs should stand in imperishable majesty for ever.

The very opposite to this high honour is spoken of as regards apostates and those who have no fixed principles, who are halting between two opinions, and have not followed the Lord fully,—"O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me *shall be written in the earth*, because they have forsaken the Lord, the Fountain of living waters" (Jer. xvii. 13).

καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, κ.τ.λ., *and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.* There is here distinct allusion to Matthew x. 32, and Luke xii. 8, passages spoken by our Lord in reference to the collective body of the disciples in their conflict with the world. The promise in these passages implied a warfare and a victory; so in the message to the Church in Sardis, the promise is to those who overcome. Those who will keep their garments clean, who will be unspotted from the world, who will not be ashamed to own and to follow their Divine Master in "the world that lieth in the wicked one," Christ will acknowledge as His in the day when God makes up His jewels. Probably there may be some reference to Psalm lxxxvii. 5, 6, where the nations are alluded to which shall, in future time, turn to the Lord, and shall be admitted into His kingdom. Egypt and Babylon are spoken of as being joined to Zion in

that day, and with them Philistia and Tyre, with Cush, where the Eunuch of Queen Candace was the first-fruits unto Christ. When the Lord writeth up the people, when He takes a census of those who shall be born anew as His own children from the heathen world, in Zion their true home, He shall rehearse, or reckon, the names of those who had been registered in the book of the living. He shall preside at this enrolment, and intimate who are to be marked down. The enumeration hitherto has been insignificant compared with what it shall be when hosts of nations shall be added to His kingdom.

When Christ reveals Himself in His glory, the reproach of His followers shall be wiped away, the long and dreary night of tribulation shall be succeeded by the morning of everlasting joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee for ever away. Having been faithful in a few things, they shall now be rulers over many things. "Those who have followed Him in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, they also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This was distinctly spoken of the Apostles, but the honour is not merely theirs—"Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor vi. 2.) What honour shall thus be conferred on human nature! The Psalmist says "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" But here we see man exalted to the highest seat in the universe, and associated with Christ in the judgment. This honour, this recognition, this supreme advancement, will add to the confusion and condemnation of Satan, and make the cup of the wicked more bitter than it would otherwise be. We do not know on what thrones the saints of God shall sit, we do not know over whom they shall reign. It may be that they shall have rule over other orders of being, that they shall be as princes in the kingdom of God, invested with authority over those angels who have been ministering spirits to them here, and who may be their messengers in the revolving cycles

of their triumphs. If the saints of God are to sit in assize upon evil angels, what a dignity shall then be conferred upon human nature, and how fully shall it then be known how Christ has fulfilled His promise that He will "confess" His faithful servants, not only of Sardis, but of every Church in the wide world, before His Father and the holy angels! Then shall the "recompense of the reward" be clearly understood, and those who have laboured and suffered for Christ, and in His cause, shall look back on the dim present, only to enhance their bliss, when earth's brightest possessions are seen to fade away by reason of the glory that excelleth.

But we must not fail to "confess Christ" here, if He will confess us before His Father, and before His angels. The confessing Christ will call for the exercise of self-denial, and, if need be self-sacrifice; but what are all our poor imperfect services when viewed in the light of immortality? "If we have only hope in this life, we are of all men the most miserable" might truly be said of our Lord's early followers, when fire and sword, and the dungeon and exile, were the goal to which their Christian profession led. But when they looked upward beyond this earthly pilgrimage to the golden streets, and pearly gates, and thrones of dazzling whiteness, and crowns of amaranth, and the City of God lighted up by the presence of the Eternal King, and where harps of gold were strung, and touched by heavenly hands, whose music rolled in sweetest harmony, with voices, deep as the sound of many waters, arising from a multitude that no man could number, ascribing blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, to Him that sitteth upon the Throne and to the Lamb—how infinitesimally small would all the acts of self-devotion rendered in the service of Christ appear, and the aspiration uppermost on every heart would be, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." "Them that

honour Me I will honour," were the Lord's words to one of His prophets; and what honour can exceed the recognition of His followers as His friends, for He shall not be ashamed to call them Brethren. Fallen, debased humanity, washed, justified, sanctified, brought into closest fellowship with God, nearer to His throne than angels—"Such honour have all the saints!"

Now is the time to confess Christ. When He comes, it will cost nothing to do so. In His triumphs every one will be ready to join; but now when, to own His name, and avow His cause, and to bear reproach for Him, there may be some little self-denial required, let it be seen that we are not ashamed of Him whom the best adore and the purest love. He lived for others. His life was one of self-sacrifice; He pleased not Himself, He sought not His own glory, He came not to do His own will, and He would have His followers imitate His example. Let us ever cling to His cross, grasp firmly His pierced hand, hold closely by His side, whether called on to be confessors before unrighteous judges, as were those sainted witnesses in the Catacombs, or to be martyrs like Polycarp, because we would refuse to dishonour Him for the bare boon of life. Let houses and lands, and family and home, fortune and friends, all be forsaken, if need be—yet the promise remains, "All things are yours"; and with the prophet who, seeing the dark shadows of the Captivity falling on his country, could look up calmly and confidently, let us in faith and assurance adopt his words—"Though the everlasting mountains be scattered, and the perpetual hills do bow, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Ver. 6. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα, κ.τ.λ., *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.* This is the usual formula with which all

the Epistles to the Churches end. For an exposition, see chap. ii. 7, where the words first occur in the Apocalypse, although of frequent use in the first three Gospels, but never in the fourth. They indicate that the subject matter of these Epistles is of supreme importance, and that they concern the Church of every place and of every time.

VI.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA.

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν τοῦ Δαβίδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων, καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει, καὶ κλείει καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίξει.

8 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα· ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἀνεῳγμένην καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον, καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου.

9 Ἰδοὺ, δίδωμι ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται· ἰδοὺ, ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἥξωσι καὶ προσκυνήσωσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου, καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

10 Ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σὲ τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

11. Ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

12 Ὁ νικῶν, ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου· καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι, καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ Θεοῦ μου τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ, ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

13 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write : These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none shall open.

8 I know thy works ; behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which no one is able to shut ; that thou hast little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name.

9 Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie ; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

10 Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 I come quickly : hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.

12 He that overcometh I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more : and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name.

13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

VI.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA.

Chap. iii. 7–14.

Ver. 7. *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινὸς, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν τοῦ Δαβὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει, καὶ κλείει καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίξει. And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write: These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none shall open.* Philadelphia was a city of Lydia, which stood about midway between Sardis and Laodicea, on a slope of Mount Tmolus, near where the valleys of the Hermus and Meander converge. It was founded B.C. 140, by Attalus Philadelphus, and called after his own name, Philadelphia—*Brotherly Love.* It has no great traditions to boast of, like Sardis, or Pergamum, and it was chiefly designed for purposes of commerce. It stood on the banks of the Cogamus, a tributary of the Hermus, was strongly fortified, and, from its commanding position, was a city of considerable importance. It was through the valley which adjoins Philadelphia that Xerxes led his forces on his way to Greece; and a plane-tree is spoken of by Herodotus under which Xerxes rested, and with the beauty of which he was so much struck, that he presented the tree with golden ornaments, and entrusted it to the special care of one of his body-guard.[1] The volcanic

[1] See Tristram's *Seven Golden Candlesticks*, p. 112.

soil of Philadelphia was well suited for the cultivation of the vine, and it was celebrated for the excellence of its wines. It suffered greatly from earthquakes, so much so, that Strabo calls it πόλις σεισμῶν πλήρης, and we are told that, in the reign of Tiberius, most of the people left the city and lived in the fields, fearing lest they should perish in their houses.[1] With all these indications of instability and change, Philadelphia has survived to the present day. It is now called by the Turks, *Allah Shehr*, "the City of God," showing that they attach some peculiar sanctity to it. Ruins of a church wall are still apparent there, and these date from the time of Theodosius. There are about 5,000 Christians of the Greek Church now in the city, which has a bishop and fifteen or twenty clergy. Gibbon, speaking of the ruin of the Churches of Asia Minor, says: "Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above four-score years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and Churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same."[2]

It is not mentioned in any other place in Holy Scripture, nor have we any means of obtaining a knowledge of its spiritual condition, except what we derive from the message addressed to it. There seems to have been a very powerful disturbing Jewish element in this heathen city, and also Jewish Christians, as distinguished from converts from heathenism; so that there are a colouring and an imagery borrowed from Old Testament usages.

The name by which Christ describes Himself is Ὁ ἅγιος, *The Holy One*. This term clearly denotes One who is per-

[1] Tacit., *Ann.*, ii. 47. [2] *Decline and Fall*, chap. 64.

fectly free from sin, One who hates sin as utterly opposed to His very nature. Just as the sensitive plant shrinks from the touch of the human hand, so does the nature of Christ from anything unholy or impure. Holiness is an attribute which belongs absolutely to God. He charges His angels with folly, and in His sight the very heavens are unclean; how much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? The title the Saviour takes to Himself in the message to the Church at Philadelphia is—"He that is Holy." This attribute the Old Testament appropriates to God exclusively; and there is therefore a claim to absolute Godhead established by the Ὁ ἅγιος of this verse.

And was not the claim well founded? He only of all the sons of men could say: "The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." The sun has its spots, the azure sky its clouds, the purest gem its flaws; but no stain leaves its imprint on Him who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," "the sweetest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." Never does He utter word to God or man, while tabernacling on earth in the days of His flesh, that expresses or implies the consciousness of a single defect.

Take the life of any one who ever lived, the most sainted and illustrious of the world's great and good, and we shall find there is always a consciousness of shortcomings, omissions, inconsistencies, and sins. But Christ reproaches Himself for nothing; He regrets nothing. His work was His Father's business; His will—"I do always those things that please the Father." He was in our world and subject to temptation, but in His life we fail to detect the least deviation from the path of holiness and truth. Well has it been said: "No lower inclinations of sin, no paltering with truth, no swerving from justice, no selfseeking, no covetousness, no ambition, can find a place in that character of such lofty purity, of such stern

veracity, of such considerate equity, of such unreserved self-sacrifice, of such disinterested love."[1] There were jealous eyes upon His every movement, which scanned His daily actions, and had there been one failure in the smallest degree, it would have been detected. There were charges made that He was in league with Satan, that He was a political adventurer, a friend of publicans and sinners; but these calumnies soon refuted themselves, and for nearly 1900 years His enemies have been wasting their energies to discredit His holy life, and defame Him as a deceiver; but they have succeeded no better than His contemporaries. It has been said, He gave way to anger when He drove the money-changers out of the temple; but it is quite possible "to be angry and sin not." There was no blind passion in the exercise of righteous indignation against the desecration of His Father's house, but only holy zeal for God's honour which consumed Him. Then we are told He devoted to destruction the barren fig-tree on His way to Jerusalem, and destroyed the herd of swine at Gadara; in the one case without any object, in the other interfering with the rights of property. But the objector forgets that the material world is ever made subservient to the moral, and in the barren fig-tree there is a representation of the condition and condemnation of the Jewish nation. As regards the transaction at Gadara, the life of the man who was healed was of more value than many swine; and as the cattle upon a thousand hills are the Lord's, He may have punished the Jews for engaging in a traffic which showed that they were despisers of the Mosaic law.

He could defiantly put the question to His accusers: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" and the silence which followed proved their inability to point to one blot in His perfect character. Had there been one flaw, it should then

[1] Canon Liddon, *Serm.*, vol. ii. p. 297.

have been exposed to the light; but their profound silence gave consent to the fact, "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Did not Judas the traitor cry out under the influence of bitter remorse, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood?" and Pilate, after washing his hands and delivering Christ to the Jews, could say, "I find no fault in Him"; and the centurion who watched at the Cross was so struck with the beauty of that spotless character, that we hear his voice, when the rending rocks and the three hours' darkness and the opening graves had borne their awful testimony, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God." Jesus is the Holy One—the absolutely Holy One. Never can *we* claim such a title—it would be utter blasphemy. To tell us that when we believe in Christ we are saved, and when thus saved we are free from sin—that we are holy, as our Redeemer is holy—is a perversion of all truth, a presumption bold enough for him who said—"Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil!" Human life is a struggle. "Not as though I had already attained" is written of them who are perfect. While no one can ever reach Christ's standard, by keeping Him before us it is possible to attain a high degree. Here beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the Divine image. The noblest virtues of the highest saints—the faith of Abraham, the purity of Joseph, the patience of Job, the piety of David, the fidelity of Daniel, the zeal of St. Paul, and the love which glowed in the bosom of St. John—all these are but the faint reflections of Him who is the Holy One of God, the only pure and perfect flower which ever grew from the root and stock of humanity.

ὁ ἀληθινὸς, *He that is true.* Jesus Christ calls Himself the Truth (John xiv. 6), and the spirit of prophecy had declared of Him that righteousness should be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. Truth is

the girdle of the Christian (Eph. vi. 14). To be true is to be like God. Man has lost that beautiful trait through sin; and it is only by becoming Christ-like that we regain that noblest of all qualities. If there is one feature which stands in bold relief in the matchless character of Christ, next to absolute purity, it is sincerity. Of all the sins which Christ most powerfully rebuked, and which drew from Him His most fierce indignation, it was that of hypocrisy. "Woe unto you, Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." Hypocrisy has been well defined, the homage which vice pays to virtue. It is the counterfeit of sincerity, the polished veneer with which falsehood assumes the appearance of truth. In our blessed Lord there was a reality which is not apparent in others. He was no flatterer. Whether truths were palatable or otherwise, they were enunciated; whether they came with withering rebuke, or were soft as the gentle dew on the opening flower. Alike He exposes the motives of His adversaries, as He does the weakness and unreality of those who wished to espouse His cause. When the multitudes who were fed by Him crowded around Him, He said, "Ye seek Me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." When the young ruler came to Him with the epithet on his lips, "Good Master!" "Why callest thou Me good?" or, "why askest thou Me concerning the good?" was Christ's answer. Why apply a title to Me which you know not whether I deserve? Why come to Me about the chief good? there is none good but God. The words of the Ruler were applied without thought, and He who is the Truth rejects them. He will have His followers count the cost of discipleship before they begin to build. Before His judges He was characterized by the same unflinching regard for sincerity; for when asked by Pilate, "Art thou a king then?" He answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause

came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." The word here used as describing Christ's character is not ἀληθὴς, but ἀληθινὸς, and the meaning to be conveyed is that He is not only true as opposed to false, "the God that cannot lie," but He is true, as distinguished from all imperfect manifestations, or approximate realizations of it. He is true, as God is true in contrast with false gods or dumb idols. His purpose cannot change: "He is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Every engagement Christ undertook He was faithful to fulfil to the letter. Even on the Cross, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He said, "I thirst." While any prophetic utterance remained unaccomplished, the final scene could not occur. And the faithfulness of Christ in fulfilling His promises when on earth, is a pledge and an assurance that every believing Christian may commit the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator. He will not withdraw His loving kindness from us, nor suffer His faithfulness to fail. When doubts and fears arise, like the boisterous waves of some angry sea, and seem to imperil the safety of many a voyager crossing life's ocean, then He will come as He did to His terrified disciples—He will rebuke the fierce winds of unbelief, and His gentle voice will be heard saying to the sea of perplexity and unrest, "Peace, be still!"

The truth of Christ can never fail. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the word of Christ shall not pass away. There are writers in the present day, as there have been in the past, who say it is only a question of time when the teachings of Christ, like all others, shall be forgotten. Christ is the ἀληθινὸς, and that being so, His truth shall endure through all generations. If that truth could be withdrawn what would replace it? What would answer the most

solemn questions—What am I? whence came I? whither am I tending? what is to follow my short existence here? From the philosophy of the world, like the Phœnician deities, there is no voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard. But Christ has rolled away all the mists and darkness with which these great questions have been surrounded. Other systems of religious belief are gradually getting feeble, because they are held by races which have no future, and because of their own inherent weakness to meet the wants and satisfy the aspirations of man; but the truth of Christ is progressing with steady march, "casting down imaginations and everything that exalts itself against Him." It has been scattered upon the broad wastes of humanity, and it has been the power of God to salvation to them that believe. It has been flung upon the wings of the wind, and it has never returned void, nor shall it be otherwise to the end:—

> "Eternal are Thy mercies Lord,
> Eternal truth attends Thy word;
> Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore,
> Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν τοῦ Δαβὶδ, κ.τ.λ., *He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and none shall shut, and He that shutteth and none shall open.* The key is the symbol of authority, and Christ here claims authority over the house of David. Now what is meant by this? We must go back to a passage in Isa. xxii. 22, where we have Shebna, the scribe, and Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household of Hezekiah, placed in juxtaposition. Shebna, in his pride, is to be driven from his post, and Eliakim, in his stead, is to be invested with the government of the house of David, the duties of which office he would fulfil with all the tenderness and benevolent care of a parent. "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."

Our blessed Lord appropriates this language to denote His own exclusive power and authority over what the house of David symbolized—namely, the kingdom of heaven ; and He clearly claims sole and supreme sovereignty over that kingdom. The keys of that kingdom are His by rightful ownership, and He can commit them to those who by Him are delegated to receive them. To St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles He handed those keys, investing His Apostles with authority "to bind and loose," "to open and shut." But we should always understand that the authority which was committed to the Apostles was different from that which He Himself retained. What Apostle could dare to say, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of Death and of Hades"? The power of the keys conferred on the Apostles extended only to the organization and subsequent discipline of the Church ; but Christ's sovereignty extended to the unseen world, to admit and exclude according to His Divine will. This supreme power Christ has never committed to any of His servants ; and we hear His declaration still, as when spoken in the days of His flesh, "I am the Door ; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture."

The keys of the house of David to be used in opening and shutting have more reference to the Church of Christ on earth than to the world that lies behind the veil ; and in this view it is a comforting reflection that, however men may err in their judgment, however faulty their administration of justice may be, there is One to whom we can always look to rectify abuses of power, to bring to light the hidden motives of men, and to dispense righteous judgment. We are not to suppose an absolute power was bestowed upon the Apostles to admit and exclude at pleasure, except in so far as they possessed the knowledge to discern spirits, which faculty they did possess, and which for a time remained in the Church.

These words of Christ were spoken long after the martyrdom of St. Peter—St. John was the only surviving Apostle—and so far from Christ's having given absolute authority of the keys to St. Peter and his successors, we find He Himself claimed the right to own the keys, and hold possession of them in His own hands. If such a power as that which our Lord retains, and which is claimed by some who "sit in Moses' seat," were really conferred, it would place man's eternal destinies arbitrarily in the hands of a hierarchy who would frequently, in the words of Ezekiel, "make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way by promising him life" (Ezek. xiii. 22). Can we doubt that, in those days of persecution, when the sword and the stake were the substitutes for liberty of conscience, and when the martyrs were made to drink deeply of the bitter cup of suffering, the decrees of wicked men were reversed by Him who is the Righteous Judge; and that those, whom ignorance, bigotry, and superstition, would exclude from their society on earth, were welcomed and honoured in glory? Christ has the keys; "He openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." "The Father hath given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as He hath given Him."

It is not the less Christ's high prerogative to hold the key of David when, in a secondary sense, the power of the keys was bestowed upon the Apostles. That power was promised to be conferred on St. Peter and his brethren of the Apostolate; and that the Apostle of the Circumcision exercised that gift is fully shown by the fact, that he was the first to admit into the Church of Christ, by the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, both Jews and Gentiles, in recognition of his noble confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" and if there were priority or pre-

ference among the Twelve, which our Lord always taught His disciples to guard against, St. Peter's spiritual apprehension and ready acknowledgment of Christ's claims, in that confession, entitled him to such preference. It was not that our Lord placed St. Peter by any act or word over the Twelve, for He calls Himself their Master, and He says, "All ye are brethren." He promises twelve thrones, not one for St. Peter above all the others; and the Church is *built* (not founded) upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the Head Corner Stone. The same power of binding and loosing was given to all the Apostles (Matt. xviii. 18), and St. Paul recognises no superiority, or supremacy, when he calls himself "not a whit behind the very chiefest of them."

This "binding and loosing" was primarily bestowed upon the Apostles, but secondarily upon all who dispense the Word and Sacraments, and who are stewards of the mysteries of God, and exercise the ministry of reconciliation. The figure is taken from those who were bound in chains as prisoners. By "loosing," the minister acts as the physician by giving the remedies which God has appointed for the remission of sin. By "binding," the same instrumentality is used in withholding the means of grace. In Apostolic times there was a godly discipline exercised in the Church. The Apostles, we find, exercised that discipline for the correction and salvation of men. In the case of the Church at Corinth (1 Cor. v. 4), the Apostle claims to pronounce sentence either of acquittal or condemnation in the person, and with the power, of Christ.

See how that power was manifest in the Apostle's delivering Hymenæus and Alexander unto Satan, by a solemn act of religious discipline—excommunication from the fellowship of the Church—that they might learn not to blaspheme, that bodily sickness and chastisements might bring them to a

sense of their sin, and that they might, by means of this salutary discipline, humble themselves, so that their spirits might be saved in the day of the Lord. We are also familiar with that discipline as laid down in St. Paul's instructions to Timothy, wherein such directions are given as, "Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine." "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear"; or as given also to Titus, "Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." This was assuredly an exercise of the power of the Keys, which, while delegated to those in authority in the Church, are still held in the hands of the Church's Head and King.

Ver. 8. *Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα· ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἀνεῳγμένην, καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτὴν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον, καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. I know thy works; (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which no one is able to shut) that thou hast little power, and didst keep My word, and didst not deny My name.* When Christ says, "I know thy works," it is not to attach censure for their imperfection, as it was to the Church in Sardis, but to recognise them as worthy of all praise. Everything that is spoken of Philadelphia redounds to its honour, and elicits from Him who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks unequivocal approbation. The word *ἰδοὺ*, *Behold*, is significant; it marks the distinguished favour which Christ had towards Philadelphia, and is the precursor of precious promises and rich blessings, which our Lord designed for the strengthening and extending of that Church.

"The 'behold' so frequent in the ancient prophets," says Stier,[1] "which was spoken only once to Smyrna as noting the temptation, and only once to Thyatira as conveying a threatening, and to Laodicea once more in connexion with

[1] Stier, *Words of Risen Saviour*, p. 182.

warning and exhortation (ver. 20), is addressed to Philadelphia thrice in connection with the highest grace and honour."

What Christ, the giver of all good things, has given to this Church, is *an open door*, and which when He openeth, no man can shut, but shall be kept open in spite of all adversaries. The expression, "open door," is one which frequently occurs in the writings of St. Paul, and in its application here, there is a beautiful harmony between the Apocalyptic messages and the teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Throughout St. Paul's writings, the "open door" refers to the admission of the Gentiles to the Church of Christ, and the opportunities and advantages which were presented for the accomplishment of that purpose. In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul, relates how the Lord had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts xiv. 27). In 1 Cor. xvi. 9, the Apostle speaks of tarrying at Ephesus, because "a great door and effectual" was opened unto him, and there were many adversaries. So in 2 Cor. ii. 12, he records how when he came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, a door was opened unto him of the Lord; and in Col. iv. 3, he asks the prayers of the faithful at Colosse, that God would open to him a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ, for which he was also in bonds. The expression then was easily understood by the Church at Philadelphia, which had been conversant with St. Paul's teaching, and afforded encouragement to that Church to persevere in its work of faith and labour of love, knowing that He who had the key of David had opened up a door of access to the Gentiles; and, no matter who were the opponents, none could shut it. Men might try to fight against God, but they should be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel, and crushed like summer dust under the wheels of the chariot. The door was opened for doing Christ's work. There was a rich harvest, and the labourers had only to go forward earnestly to the

work, and they should return with joy bringing their sheaves with them.

There was an opening for the spread of gospel truth, and the assurance given by Christ was the warrant to the Church that in the use of means God would give His blessing. No doubt there were Judaizing teachers trying to shut the door, who pretended, as their fathers had claimed, to have the key of knowledge, and who, in their exclusiveness, were ready to shut out any who would not comply with their requirements. Such had been the case in the Churches of Galatia, and these false Jews were censured by St. Paul for their efforts in endeavouring to close the door against any who would not turn back to the weak and beggarly elements of Judaism, whereunto they desired them again to be in bondage (Gal. iv. 9). St. Ignatius, in his Epistle to the Church of Philadelphia,[1] in his comment on the passage under consideration, thus writes: "If any one preaches Judaism do not hearken to him. It is better to receive Christianity, from one who is circumcised, than Judaism from one who is uncircumcised. (Unless they preach Jesus Christ, they are mere pillars and tombs of the dead, on which the names of men are inscribed. Christ alone is the door to the Father, through which Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Prophets and Apostles of the Church, enter in." He alone can open the door of the heart, as He did that of Lydia, so that men will attend to the things that are spoken. The door of Christ's fold is wide enough for all to enter—Him that cometh He will in no wise cast out. He has never left Himself without witness. When men have tried to shut the door of His grace, He has kept it open. In Ahab's time there were still seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. A door was opened in Babylon too, and the monarch on his throne had to acknowledge the God of the captive Israelites, as the Lord of heaven and earth.

[1] S. Ignat., *Ep. to Philad.*, sec. 6.

In the early ages of Christianity, after the persecuting power of Pagan Rome had spent itself—see that proud city crumbling into fragments, and its fall paving the way for the establishment of Christ's Kingdom. Christianity had its adversaries then, as it has now, but, like Julian the Apostate, they were forced to cry, "O Galilean, Thou hast conquered!" The word of God will have free course and be glorified, in the conversion of sinners and in the ingathering of saints into Christ's Kingdom, until the number of God's elect is accomplished, and the Church shall be complete: and, at last, He who has the key of David, shall open the bars of the grave, and gather from east and west, and north and south, His scattered children, and presenting them before His Father and our Father, His God and our God, shall say of them: "These my children were dead and are alive again, they were lost and are found." "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, κ.τ.λ., *that thou hast little power.* In the rendering of our English version, and indeed the Revised Version, the translation is not exact. It is not "because thou hast a little strength," for that would be to ascribe power to the Church of Philadelphia; whereas it is *weakness* that is intended, and in this weakness to make manifest the power of God. Because human strength was so slight, and yet it had been mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds—it had carried the truth successfully into the ranks of paganism; for the work of God was spreading widely wherever the ambassadors of the gospel penetrated—this is the reason why the praise is here bestowed. It is considered that the Church in Philadelphia was poor in worldly goods, and possessed of but few earthly advantages; hence, as it was at Corinth in the days of St. Paul, the foolishness of God was wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men.

God sets before the Church here an open door, because she has little strength, her conscious weakness fitting her the more as an object of the Lord's power. It shows how God takes the weak things of this world to confound the mighty, and things that are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. We may suppose a weak flock and a little flock, but it was the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. Though feeble in temporal power, they were not so in spiritual; they were rich in grace, rich in faith and good works, and by persevering effort in the cause of truth, never wearying in well doing, they might well be pointed to as answering the question, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Where there is but little strength, if we only put it forth, in the act of using it more will be given. Like the widow's oil, it will be multiplied. We should always remember that, whatever we are, it is God's grace has made us so. "By the grace of God I am what I am," was St. Paul's personal experience, and the same must be that of all Christian believers till the end of time. Like the man with the withered hand, when Christ told him to stretch it forth, he made the effort, and in the act of doing so, it was restored perfectly whole. It is not otherwise in God's gracious dealings with the soul. While there is no inherent power, while spiritual paralysis has crept through every part, when Christ manifests Himself, and knocks at the door of the heart, on our putting forth the effort to receive Him, He will command the blessing. When there are so many adversaries to contend with, one would suppose that "little strength," would be utterly inadequate to enable the spiritual combatant to fight the good fight; but just as the little pebble from the brook, because it was directed by the power of God, smote down the proud Goliath, so it needs no prophet to predict on what side shall be the victory, for "as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

There had been some period in the history of the Church at

Philadelphia when the faith of its members had been put to the test. We cannot specify the exact time, as we have no data except what the passage here furnishes; but whatever that trial had been, whether persecution, such as had overtaken the Church in Smyrna, through Judaizing teachers, or whether there had been an attempt made to obliterate the past triumphs of the gospel, and to arrest its future progress, it is cheering to have the testimony from the Saviour's lips—"Behold I have set before thee a door opened, because thou hast little strength, and didst keep My word, and didst not deny My name." The door could not be shut when Christ set it open. All the power of the combined forces of the Prince of darkness would be in vain. The Angel of the Church had kept the faith, he had been loyal to his Lord, he had not been ashamed of Christ before men, he had not cried "Anathema," as the unbelieving Jews did to the name of Christ; therefore, he receives the "Well done!" from the Church's Head. What a noble testimony to the primitive excellence of this Church! Well might they take up the triumphant challenge of the Apostle of the Gentiles and say —Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall tribulation?* No, it shall but hurry us to Him for shelter. *Shall distress?* No; it shall only make us grasp the more firmly His pierced hand. *Shall persecution?* No; the dungeon shall be a Bethel, and the Martyr's Cross shall only be the passport to the Martyr's Crown. *Shall famine?* No; in the land of His exile, the prodigal will more quickly return to His Father's house where there is plenty and to spare. *Shall nakedness?* No; there is a robe of spotless purity which Christ offers to all who will accept it, in which we can stand in the presence of God, faultless before His throne. *Shall peril?* No; as He came in the fourth watch of the night to His despairing and toiling disciples, who, through the rifts of the storm, saw His form and heard His voice—so shall we, in the dark night of

our difficulty, hear Him say, "It is I, be not afraid." *Shall sword?* No; it is powerless to sever the ties which bind us to the everlasting throne. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."

Ver. 9. *Ἰδοὺ, δίδωμι ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται· ἰδοὺ, ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἥξωσι καὶ προσκυνήσωσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου, καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. Behold I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.* The most inveterate enemies of the Church of Christ were the Jews. We read of them in Thessalonica, in Smyrna, and here in Philadelphia; and in every case most hostile and embittered against the Christians. In Palestine, they were the sole persecutors of the Church; and, elsewhere, if they did not directly oppose the Gospel, they instigated others to do so. In Smyrna, the same term, "Synagogue of Satan," is applied to them as here. The Jews claimed to be God's people, but they who denied that Jesus was the Son of God, who reproached and reviled Him, could not belong to the true synagogue; they were a synagogue of Satan, and were unworthy of the name Jew. The curse they invoked upon themselves, when they cried that Christ's blood might be on them and on their children, is still in force, and in the persecution of Christians they have been in every age crucifying the Son of God afresh. In the ancient Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, containing an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, we find that no people were more virulent and wicked than the Jews. Christ's message to the Smyrneans was, not to fear their enemies, but to be faithful unto death. There was One with His people then, as there had been in the fiery furnace with the

three Hebrew children, and they should come forth from every trial and persecution unscathed. But here the Saviour goes a step further, and extends His promise; for it is not only that the Church of Philadelphia should be preserved from the power of the enemy, but that it should triumph over its most powerful foes—that the very opponents of Christ, who were now working with malice against the spread of Gospel truth and trying to extinguish it from the face of the earth, would, many of them, be brought to conviction, and led to acknowledge that God was with His people of a truth. The very wrath of man would be overruled so as to be made to praise God. There was to be a sifting of the Church, a time of fierce persecution; and many of these very people who were then the most determined opponents of Christianity would, when the Heathen power involved all in one common calamity, come and do homage to those noble confessors of Christ, when they saw their consistent lives and virtuous conduct taking knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

Stier considers the allusion is here not to Jewish converts, but to false Christians, who should be aroused to see their sin of opposing God, and be humbled and converted; and he says in a note:[1] "The Apocalypse, so frequently condemned as Jewish, nowhere speaks expressly of Israel's restoration, and final place of honour; only in chap. xx. 9, is there even a hidden allusion to it. Here in chap. iii. 9, there is certainly no reference to the conversion of the Jews and missions to that people." Archbishop Trench, on the other hand, sees the Jewish persecutors of the Church of Christ in Philadelphia acknowledging the presence of God in that Church, and brought to own Jesus of Nazareth, as the promised Messiah, of whom Moses and the Prophets did write. In further proof of this position, in the Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Philadelphian Church, sec. 8, p. 102,

[1] Stier, *Words of Risen Saviour*, p. 186.

it is taken for granted that there were then in the Church of Philadelphia those who were converts from the Jewish faith; for St. Ignatius writes, "I have heard some say, Unless I find it in the ancient writings, I will not believe in the gospel . . . but to me the most ancient records are Jesus Christ." We are not to expect a general conversion of Jews in this dispensation—only a remnant according to the election of grace—nor are we to look for the Gospel universally received before the Second Advent, for it is only to be preached for a *witness* unto all nations; and what occurred at Philadelphia in those early days of Christianity is still manifest in the world.

We have seen in the history of the Church, many who were its greatest enemies—who were infuriate against it—led to the feet of Jesus. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Is not His word as the hammer that breaketh the flinty rock in pieces? And when its power is seen in the life of a Christian, is it not a proof that Jesus is still in the midst of us? When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh his enemies to be at peace with him; and when He reclaims the wanderer, when He restrains the lawless, when He changes the stony heart into one of flesh, and stays the fury of the persecutor—can it be doubted that Christ loves His Church, and will permit no weapon formed against it to prosper? These very persons, who had been of the synagogue of Satan, would come and be willing to take the lowest offices in the Church, and do homage to those whom they once persecuted, just as it was in the early days of Christianity, when we read of a great company of the priests becoming obedient to the faith, or the gaoler at Philippi falling down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, or when at Ephesus multitudes brought their books of curious arts—the Ἐφέσια γράμματα—and burned them, "and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts xix. 19, 20).

Ver. 10. *Ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σὲ τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Because thou didst keep the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.* What are we to understand by the word of Christ's patience? Was it the message of Christ that taught endurance, as we find in Matt. xxiv. 13, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved"; or the injunction in the same connexion, when speaking of the persecution His disciples should meet from their adversaries, He said, "In your patience possess ye your souls"? Does He here inculcate the exhibition of that calm, meek submission on the part of the Church at Philadelphia, which He who had endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself had ever shown? In the life of Jesus, "The Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," we see at all times a spirit of meekness and long-suffering. When the disciples would have called down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, He rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of. The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." The word of Christ's patience may be taken as denoting the whole of His teaching, which, from His Sermon on the Mount to His last utterances, was full of that calm spirit of endurance under injuries wrongly inflicted, and which we look for in vain in the teaching of the Jewish Rabbis. The people whom he addressed were not to retaliate, or render evil for evil, but wait patiently until Christ should come, who would render to every man according to his works.

Persecution was at hand either in the reign of Domitian, or that of Trajan, which would be more fierce and widespread than it had been during the reign of Nero, whose violence was directed chiefly against the Christians in Rome.

The Church's Divine Head is desirous to prepare the Christians for the trials which were yet before them. They were not to be exempted from persecution—"Yea, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," St. Paul had already declared. This was part of the discipline by which God was to prepare the Church for the calm and rest of heaven. Better to suffer patiently for well doing, than fall under the punishment justly deserved for wrong doing. In the one case, it would prove salutary, in the other it would be penal. The attitude of the Philadelphian Church had been one of patient waiting for Christ. They did not cry with the prophet of old, "O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down"; but were looking, through the events of providence, to Him who was "ordering all things according to the counsel of His own will." There were in the Church many who had borne aggravated and cruel sufferings, simply because they were the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, and in this way they had shown they were not ashamed of Him, and of the cause for which they suffered. They had been following the blessed steps of His most holy life, "Who did no sin neither was guile found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously," and who had taught publicly, both by precept and example, the glory of patience under undeserved wrong. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely. Rejoice and be exceeding glad."

Christians are not to seek persecution or trial, but, when it comes, they are to be brave and meet it with calm endurance. There are professing Christians who will tell us, this submission to undeserved wrong is unmanly—that it evinces weakness and cowardice, and is unworthy of that force of character which should characterize those who claim to be men. But

they who thus speak have never asked themselves, in what does moral strength consist? The ancients thought heroism, courage, physical strength, were the essence of virtue, and the Greek word, ἀρετὴ (virtue), was derived from Ἄρης, Mars, the god of war. Moral strength is not greatest when most demonstrative; on the contrary, to calmly await the issues of God's dealings as our blessed Redeemer did, and bless a scoffing world from beneath His crown of thorns, is an illustration of moral strength greater than the excitement which leads the soldier into the thick of battle, or to charge the enemy at the cannon's mouth. The rule laid down by our Lord is positive. It is not for us to cry "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but rather to listen to the Divine teaching, "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." "As He is, so are we in this world." We are to be followers of Him; and therefore if we would be kept by Him, we must also keep the word of His patience.

How far the tribulation extended, which is here alluded to, we have no possibility of ascertaining. The clause, "them that dwell upon the earth," is indefinite, although, in the previous part of the verse, the trial is said to be about to come on all the world. But "all the world" is an expression which frequently is used in the New Testament to denote the Roman Empire; and this may have been the meaning of it in the time of Trajan, who caused St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, to be martyred for the faith, in the year 107, very shortly after the time of St. John. The Angel of the Philadelphian Church, to whom the promise is here made, is spoken of by St. Ignatius in terms which exactly correspond to his having kept "the word of Christ's patience"; for he says that "he knew him not to have obtained the ministry by selfish, or worldly motives, nor through vainglory, but from the love of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am perfectly charmed with His meekness; when silent, he exhibits more power than vain speakers."[1] The passage here alluding to the tribulation which was to try them that dwell upon the earth, may have a prophetic bearing upon the latter days as to the Church of Christ. There will, no doubt, be an hour of temptation before the final conflict, when some will be influenced by strong delusion to believe a lie; but there will be also the faithful who, by watchfulness and prayer, will keep the word of Christ's patience, and who will find the protection promised, and be triumphant in the struggle.

Ver. 11. *Ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου. I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.* The word *Ἰδού, Behold*, is not in the Greek. It is a spurious reading from Rev. xxii. 7, and it has been omitted in the Revised Version. This word, introduced frequently by the prophets in order to call attention to their communications, is used on several occasions in the Revelation.

The Second Advent of Christ is the sum and substance of the Apocalypse. It is the keynote struck in the beginning of the first chapter, and it re-echoes throughout the entire book until its close. It was the star of hope to the suffering Church; for, however great her trials, she felt that they would be of short duration, and more than compensated by the exceeding weight of glory she should realize when He, who is the Church's Life, should appear. But though the announcement, "I come quickly," led the Church to believe that the Second Advent was near, one generation succeeded after another without seeing the object of their hope attained. This seemed to confound all ideas of nearness and distance; but an event, which would be remote, when measured

[1] Ignat., *Epist. to Philad.*, sec. 1.

by a finite scale, would be near to an intellect that gathers as into a point two mighty eternities. There was a certain nearness according to Divine computation, but a possible nearness according to human ; and there was a wise design in this, for it was to meet the conditions of the Church in all ages. It was among the things God had kept in His own power ; He did not make the exact time a subject of revelation.

There are things He has put in our power. He has made known certain facts to us, and when He has done so, He has in a sense rendered it impossible to recall these facts. He cannot lie, He cannot change, He cannot deny Himself—but the precise period of the Second Advent is unknown to men and angels. This is designed to promote watchfulness ; for had there been a fixed time revealed, or had a time been named so distant that a given generation could have calculated on living out its day, the world would have been lulled into carnal security, and a spiritual lethargy would have seized all its members. As it is, it is difficult to prevent even those who are waiting for Christ from slumbering. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." The course of Providence has afforded us certain landmarks by which we may take our bearings, and find our position ; but if there is one thing more objectionable than another, it is to hear people speak of that great event, as if they themselves were possessed of the spirit of prophecy, and to make positive statements, many of which even the very men who made them have lived to see falsified.

We are to wait, as well as watch, not to yield to impatience, and be led to say with the scoffers, "Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation ?" It is not reverent to lift the lid of the ark and look within. We must be content to survey the outlines of prophecy fulfilled

and being fulfilled, and feel that, though Christ's Advent may not be in our day, it shall assuredly take place when the preparatory processes shall have been completed. God's movements are slow and regular. How slow are the processes of the natural world—the long progressions by which it was fitted up as the abode of man—how slow, too, were the developments of Revelation, when four thousand years elapsed before a manifested Saviour took His place among the things of time and sense! See also the events of history, all of which had a long period of preparation. The flood did not come until the wickedness of man had reached its utmost limit, and until a hundred and twenty years had been allowed to pass, during which offers of mercy were held out in vain. Or to take an event in more recent time, the French Revolution. We might suppose from the suddenness with which it burst in 1789, that it was the result of some immediate impulse, and had no previous period of preparation; but, as Canon Liddon observes, its forces were collecting slowly and surely for three generations at least, amid the splendours and sins of the old French monarchy. The Second Advent is not yet at our doors; but if we can gauge the deep things of prophecy—now matters of history—with any degree of accuracy, we are forced to believe that everything is in preparation for it. As moments pass, as actions are done or left undone, as lives are lived, there is a secret communication between earth and heaven, and when all is complete, the announcement shall be made, "It is done!" "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever."

We are told that in the last days perilous times shall come. We have much to be thankful for, but never were the days of peril more appalling than now. Lawfully constituted authority is resisted, and its claims are ignored; and secularism, socialism, and infidelity are raising their hydra-like heads, in

ungovernable rage, and spreading consternation and panic over the face of the earth. Forty years after our Lord's ascension, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jews were scattered to the four winds of heaven, to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Wherever there is a Jew on the face of the earth, he affords eloquent evidence of the truth of Christianity. We point to him and say, In your history and the history of your race, has not the imprecation, "His blood be upon us, and on our children," been fully verified? There is too the gradual "drying up of the Euphrates," or the wasting away of the Mahometan power. There is fast approaching, judging from the clouds now gathering, a terrible struggle between light and darkness; and although God shall never be left without a witness, yet from our Lord's own words, "when the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?" it would seem as if these witnesses would be few.

There never was a time when scoffers were more numerous, or when faith in the supernatural had lost its hold on men's minds to the same extent as the present. All looks quiet and settled, say they, events occur in regular sequence, nature's uniformity prevails, and the cycles of time revolve precisely as a thousand years ago. An iron law of necessity regulates creation, and there is nothing new under the sun. This may be the treacherous calm, before the outbursting of the storm. This may be the pause, like that given for the Christians before Jerusalem's overthrow to flee to Pella. As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Lot, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. There are a few certain landmarks which we find laid down for our guidance.[1] If the Second Advent was near in the days of the Seer of Patmos, how much nearer now! When we see these things begin to come to pass, we are told to lift up our heads, for our

[1] See on Rev. i. 7.

redemption draweth nigh. The announcement, "I come quickly," how greatly it must have animated and encouraged the Philadelphian Church, which had been told of the coming trial that was to try all that dwell on the earth. Though the opposing forces were powerful, though the contest would be severe, yet there was One coming to redress the overweighted balance, and who would dash to pieces the enemies of His Church, and uphold those who had not been ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, κ.τ.λ., *hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.* The time was at hand when they should no longer be "prisoners of hope." Their calm endurance would soon be ended, and their patience would have its perfect work. The crown of life would be bestowed, but not till the end. They were yet in the battle of life, and the crown was not to be conferred till the warfare was accomplished. The exhortation given here is to hold fast that thou hast. What was this? Was it her little strength—her heroic patience—and her unflagging zeal—all of which had been characteristic of this Church? Stier paraphrases the verse thus: "Hold fast thy standing in grace, with persevering fidelity, that no man may receive at the last thy crown of victory; that is, instead of thyself." Surely we are not to suppose there are a certain number of crowns laid up, which if some were forfeited, other competitors would receive. There will be crowns of righteousness for all them who love Christ's appearing. There is a crown for each faithful servant, and no one can lose his crown but by his own fault. "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones, which believe in Me, should perish." God willeth all men to be saved. The word, crown, is not διαδῆμα, but στέφανος. The latter was the laurel crown made of bay leaves, or parsley, which, at the Olympic and other games, was given to the conqueror.

The figure is here introduced as applicable to the Church

at Philadelphia contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints, and its members are called upon to endure hardness as good soldiers. Amid all their patient endurance, they were ever to be looking forward, keeping their eyes fixed on the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. They were not to look back, as this was the first step towards apostasy. They were to keep the crown in view, and not lose it in the battle of life. Indeed, the language here used would lead us to suppose that, though still a militant Church, it was assured of the prize for which it was contending. In this case, it should never be that the last should be first and the first last, yet still warning was needful. St. Paul could say, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me, and not for me only, but for all them also that love His (Christ's) appearing"; and yet in 1 Cor. ix. 27, he speaks as if he had not that assurance which he expresses here, and as if he did not know whether he might not fall away from grace given, and become reprobate. It is a dangerous error which has crept in among some professing Christians to speak of personal assurance of salvation, as if they had entered within the pearly gates, and were walking the golden floor of heaven. It is true we should endeavour to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, to ascertain what the ground of our hope is, and to labour that our hearts condemn us not of any disregard or neglect of duty which we owe to God; but, even then, we can only see ourselves as man seeth, and it would be highly presumptuous to suppose that there are not many defects in us which have escaped our own detection, that are apparent to the eye of Him who seeth not as man seeth, and in whose sight the very heavens are unclean.

What then may we regard as implied in the exhortation, "hold fast that thou hast"? If the Church at Philadelphia

did not hold fast what was here enjoined, it should lose the crown. The injunction implies, Hold fast the truth. Buy the truth and sell it not—keep fast the word of Christ's patience. It is the rule of your life, and of your faith. It is the gift of God to your souls, and in it you hear His voice speaking to His children. It contains all things necessary to salvation; and while it discloses an answer to the question, How shall a man be just with God? it reveals also the secret as to how we may be made meet for heaven.

> "This lamp from off the everlasting throne
> Mercy brought down, and in the night of time
> Stands, casting on the dark its azure bow,
> And evermore beseeching men with sighs and tears,
> And earnest prayers, to read, believe and live."

Hold fast Christ and Him crucified. Justification through faith in Him has been well called the Article of a standing or a falling Church. Whenever we lose sight of this grand cardinal doctrine of Christianity, we get entangled with human systems, and lose our way. This is the great stem of the tree of Christianity; all other doctrines are like the shoots which branch from it. It is the great keystone of faith. Let this be weakened, undermined, or removed, and all hope perishes. If I am told I need absolution, I can say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." If it is said, I must do good works which may procure God's favour, I find it written: "But after the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." If I want peace with God, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." If

I want a title to heaven, I hear the voice of Jesus saying, "By Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture." All we need we have in Christ. He is made to us our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.

But what was the Church at Philadelphia specially enjoined to hold fast? They had little strength; they were to use it, and to find that they could do all things through Christ who strengthened them. They had an open door—means of usefulness; they were to keep it open in the face of all opposition, knowing that more were they who were for them than they who were against them. They had exercised patience; they were still to endure, like Moses, as seeing Him who was invisible. They had been zealous in Christ's cause; they were not now "to weary in well doing," but go on adding to their Christian virtues and excellences, so that they should be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. All these graces were to shine conspicuously in their daily lives, and these saving principles were to be treasured up in their hearts; and whatever sorrows or troubles might come, yet they should fear no evil, but feel that though the mountains should depart and the hills be removed, God's loving kindness should not depart from them, nor should the covenant of His peace be removed. Hold fast that which thou hast; that no man take thy crown. The crown which is laid up for thee in heaven—it is yours, and see that you are not deprived of it by your own default. Persevere in the course which you have begun—be faithful unto death, and yours shall be the crown of life. Trench paraphrases the passage thus: "Let no man, Christ would say, deprive thee of the glorious reward laid up for thee in heaven, of which many of My adversaries and thine would fain rob thee; but which only one, even thyself can ever cause thee to lose indeed."

Ver. 12. *Ὁ νικῶν, ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου· καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι, καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ, ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. He that overcometh I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God, and Mine own new name.* The successful competitors in the Christian race have a higher honour than that to which reference is made in the preceding verse. There they are spoken of as about to be crowned like the athlete who won the prize in the ancient games; but here there is still something more to be enjoyed when the struggle is over, and which is fitted to give fresh stimulus to the Philadelphian Church in running the heavenly race, and to inspire it with fresh ardour in maintaining the fight of faith. "To him that overcometh." The Judaizing teachers would require to be met, and their false tenets exposed, and afterwards when tribulation should arise because of the word, they who would be found faithful in the trying ordeal, they who would hold fast that which they had hitherto held—their zeal, their faith, their constancy, patience, the little strength they had—would have an honour bestowed upon them by the Son of God, in comparison with which the noblest rewards conferred on earth's heroes would fade away into obscurity. What that honour would be opens up to us some of those grand and glorious visions, with which the Book of Revelation closes. "I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God."

It has been thought by some that, as reference is made in the previous part of this Epistle, to Shebna, the steward of Hezekiah, and Eliakim, who was Prefect of the Palace, the former having been degraded, while the latter was raised to

the highest dignity, so here there is an allusion to this circumstance, in the promise that he that overcometh should go no more out; that is, that he should not be cast out and displaced as Shebna was, but that Christ would make him a pillar in the temple of His God; like to Eliakim, who was to be fastened as a nail in a sure place. But there is something very much higher in dignity than this allusion would typify; and the "pillar in the temple of My God," is an emblem of distinction and glory to be enjoyed at Christ's Second Advent, when the New Jerusalem shall come down from heaven.

The word, "pillar," aptly applies here; for Philadelphia had been frequently visited by earthquakes, and the emblem of stability and permanence has a special significance. St. John was familiar with the Temple of Jerusalem—he had gone out and in with Him who was Lord of the Temple—he had been amongst the Twelve who were admiring the stones of that Temple when Christ foretold that there should not be left one stone upon another that should not be thrown down. Now, if there were in the Philadelphian Church converts from Judaism, they must have known something of the colossal marble pillars which were the glory of the Herodian Temple, and which symbolized strength and duration. Or, looking back through the vista of a thousand years, perhaps our Lord would remind that Church of the two bronze pillars which stood in front of the Temple of king Solomon, and which remained amid all the vicissitudes of the nation, until the time of the Captivity, when they were broken up by the Chaldeans (Jer. lii. 17). They were called Jachin (Establishment) and Boaz (Strength). Both pillars pointed to the God of Israel as the support and upholder of His Church. Now he who would overcome should be like one of those pillars, not in the Church on earth, but in the Heavenly Temple. And when we think of what is said of the Church of Philadelphia—

"Thou hast little strength"—out of weakness she is made strong—does not the promise here show how Christ can take the humblest, weakest instrument in His Church, and fit him for holding the highest dignity and honour in glory? Bishop Wordsworth says that, in the ancient temples of Asia, the country to which St. John wrote, and of Greece, pillars of temples were often sculptured *in human shape*, such as the Caryatides or Canephoræ, now standing in the Erectheum at Athens, and the Atlantes, Telamones, and Persæ, of which some specimens are still visible at Pompeii, and are represented in the paintings on the Baths of Titus, at Rome.[1] Indeed the word, "pillar," has been applied in Gal. ii. 9, to SS. Peter, James, and John. The Church at Jerusalem was the Temple of the living God; and these Apostles, who are called "pillars," were so designated from the power with which they taught the great doctrines of Christianity, just as the Jews applied the term to designate the great teachers of the law. In classical writers the same idea is conveyed—where for example, we read, *στύλοι γὰρ οἴκων εἰσὶ παῖδες ἄρσενες*, "Male children are the pillars of houses" (*Eurip. Iph. T.*, 57). As the faithful at Philadelphia had upheld the cause of Christ against their adversaries, they might well be called pillars; but whatever they had been on earth, Christ says of every one that would overcome, he should be a pillar in the house of His God. In the words of Isaiah, "Even to them will I give in Mine house, and within My walls, a place and a name better than of sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (Isa. lvi. 5).

Archbishop Trench does not think there is any reference whatever in the promise to the Church at Philadelphia to the pillars that were in the porch of Solomon's Temple, because the words, "and he shall go no more out," would imply that

[1] Bishop Wordsworth, *on Rev.*, p. 180.

the pillars were within the Temple, whereas they were always without the Temple, and would have served very ill to set forth the blessedness of the redeemed, who shall be always within it. But it is a vexed question as to whether the bronze pillars were in the porch, or before it, and whether they formed supports to the roof, or were merely ornamental. The language of Scripture is not decisive on this point. Rawlinson tells us that the Phœnicians used *isolated* metal columns as sacred ornaments; and the late Dean Stanley says, that "when we get a representation of a Phœnician temple, it always has a pillar, or pillars, standing within or before it." There are others who have argued that the pillars were within the porch, and were made to give support to the roof of the porch, which was 30 feet wide, and required some such pillars upon which to rest beams; but the balance of evidence is in favour of the view that the pillars, Jachin and Boaz, were within the porch, not as affording support to the roof, but as ornaments, to give beauty and dignity to the temple, and to symbolize the power and dignity of the Being to whom it was dedicated.[1]

May we not suppose that the word "pillar," is to be taken here in the abstract, just as we find it applied in Gal. ii. 9, where the Apostles are called by this name, from the manner in which they had upheld the truth of God, and proclaimed it to the world? The Church is called the pillar and ground of the truth, because it upholds the truth and displays it to the world. Now he that overcometh would be like one of those finished and stable pillars which St. John was familiar with, as beautifying and giving dignity to buildings. He should be in the heavenly temple—essentially changed from what he was here, "having but little strength" —stablished, strong, and unfailing as a pillar; as in Zech. xii. 8: "In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of

[1] See *Pulp. Comm.*, on 1 Kings vii. 21.

Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." Their dwelling would be in God's house, and the idea of security, safety, and strength, is implied in their going no more out. All temptation shall there be at an end, and there shall be no danger of any falling back; for having reached that place of honour and eminence, its happy enjoyment can never be forfeited. Even on earth we may regard those who are eminent for piety as pillars to the Church. There is no one that comes in contact with the excellent of the earth, who, if not benefited, but must have his responsibilities increased.

Pillars were erected in ancient times to record remarkable events. Trajan's Column at Rome was one such; and if we go back to Jewish times, Samuel, on the occasion of the deliverance wrought for the nation by God in scattering and discomfiting the Philistines, raised a pillar at Mizpeh, with the inscription: "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." So shall the Christian conqueror be a monument in the City of God, and in the Heavenly Temple, to that grace which enabled him to overcome; a monument which will last when earth and the things upon it shall be consumed, one which the rude hand of time shall not deface, but which shall remain immoveable among the things that are shaken.

There is a beautiful contrast shown here, as has been already observed, between the Church "with little strength," struggling against its formidable foes in the world, and now having accomplished her warfare, fixed in everlasting security and strength; and there may be also noticed a second contrast between the *holding fast* that which the Church had received on earth, and being now a pillar *set fast* in the temple of God.[1] Who but the dweller in Philadelphia, a city so frequently visited by earthquakes, that the inhabit-

[1] Bishop Wordsworth, *on Rev.*, p. 180.

ants had on several occasions, at the first premonitory symptoms, to betake themselves to the fields to escape immediate death—who but he could so well enter into the fulness of the promise that he should go no more out? Time after time had all the stately columns of the heathen temples and other public edifices been laid in ruins, and there was no guarantee that scenes of desolation might not at any moment appear. Now the promise taught the Church to look forward to a day when these disasters should have for ever ceased, and when safety and stability would mark the Christian's dwelling place—when he should never be startled by the rumbling earthquake, and when he should never have occasion to go any more out. As a recent writer has beautifully said, alluding to the promise, "He shall go out no more"—for no earthquake can move the eternal pillars, no shaking of the strong foundations drive out the inhabitants of the Heavenly City.[1]

There is a striking appropriateness in this promise, if we think of the special antagonists which the Church at Philadelphia had to contend with—if we think of a Synagogue of Satan, of unbelieving Jews, who were using all craft and subtilty of unrighteousness to undermine the faith of the Christians. Probably they would say, Why do you abandon the teaching of the Prophets? Why separate yourselves from God's ancient people? You have no city to pray towards, and you cannot expect God to accept your worship. Renounce Jesus of Nazareth, and attach yourselves to us who have the promises, covenants, and hopes of the Fathers, and God will then be ready to hear your prayers and help you. Christ's promise is, "Him that overcometh (this temptation among others) will I make a pillar in the temple of My God," in the temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Whatever may be the treatment he shall experience at the

[1] Tristram, *Seven Golden Candlesticks*, p. 124.

hands of the Synagogue of Satan—excommunication or exclusion—from the heavenly temple he shall go no more out.

Besides, when St. John wrote the Revelation, we may consider the Temple at Jerusalem was no more. The soldiers of Titus had burned it, and by fire and sword had brought incalculable suffering on the nation. The Church at Philadelphia might therefore ask, Where is now your Temple that was once your boast? It has fallen, and your race are scattered to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. You are to be a hissing and a by-word among all nations; but we, Christians, have a kingdom that cannot be removed—we have a city whose builder and maker is God—we have a Temple lighted up by the presence of God and the Lamb. Jerusalem may become a desolation, but we are citizens of Heaven, from whose ineffable glory we can never be separated, but where we shall stand as pillars to perpetuate the praise of Him who loved us and washed away our sins in His own blood.

"He shall go no more out." While here there is the possibility of failure; to the very last we need to exercise constant watchfulness and prayer; and even an Apostle, who was indeed a pillar, feared lest he should fail at last and be rejected; but the conquerors in the battle of life are to have, as the reward of their earnest and persevering struggles, an assurance of a permanent possession. They had each been "living stones" in the spiritual Temple on earth; now they are to be "pillars" in the heavenly. Truly beautiful are St. Augustine's ardent aspirations to realize the promise here made to the Philadelphian Church, when he exclaimed: "Quis non desideret illam Civitatem unde amicus non exit, quo inimicus non intrat?" "Who is there that will not long for that City, out of which no friend departs, and into which no enemy can enter?"

When they have reached the heavenly kingdom, the object

of their ambition, they are closed in for ever—for ever with the Lord—the doors are shut to afford them security, and to exclude the stranger and alien, who would intermeddle with their joy. They have gained the victory on earth, and now the warfare over, the great tribulation forgotten, they stand before the throne. Already has heaven been gathering in the spoils of many generations, already many a noble pillar has been erected within the portals of the Great Temple—the gate is yet open—yet there is room. But soon heaven's door shall be shut, to keep in the family when all are gathered home; and those very Philadelphian witnesses shall be among the brightest trophies of the Saviour's conquest, their lustre undimmed by any passing cloud, and their stability unaffected by change, and unimpaired by time.

καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν, κ.τ.λ., *and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, etc.* Inscriptions were in ancient times, as they are now, engraven on pillars, but the idea of a pillar is in this part of the verse lost sight of, and what is promised now is an inscription written upon the victor himself. The name of God will be written on their foreheads (Rev. xiv. 1), to indicate whose they are, to show openly that they belong to God; not as when they were on earth, frequently unnoticed and unknown amongst men; and to exhibit to the Universe their right and title to be admitted into the Heavenly City. Like the Jewish High Priest who, upon his forehead, wore a golden plate attached to the mitre, on which was inscribed, "Holiness to the Lord," so here the conqueror would have the name of God inscribed on his forehead, to mark proprietorship. While on earth, they were priests unto God, in so far as presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice, as offering the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of their lips giving thanks to His name; and now they are sharers with their Lord in his kingly priesthood. That royal priesthood

they enjoyed in some degree while even on earth, for they were members of the mystical body of Christ, who is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek; but now they are manifest as kings and priests unto God, by having God's name written on their foreheads. It will be then apparent in whose service they had been enlisted, to what family they belonged, and what noble acts they had done to prove their right to be recognised and established as pillars in heaven.

The name of God was not only to be written upon them, but their heavenly citizenship proclaimed. "And the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God, and Mine own new name!" The rights and immunities of the new Jerusalem were to be theirs who should conquer. They should become citizens of that city which is above, whose builder and maker is God, and which city shall be ultimately manifested as the dwelling place of God with His saints. All should know the city to which the conqueror belonged, and to whose privileges he was entitled. There is clearly reference here to Rev. xxi. 10. Roman citizenship was the highest honour that could be conferred for services rendered to the state, and was the much coveted dignity of many who desired to come under the protection of ancient Rome. It might be inherited, purchased, or conferred as a reward for faithful service. It was the proud boast of St. Paul that he was a free born Roman citizen, which the chief captain had acquired after a lifelong ambition only by purchase (Acts xxii. 28). This dignity included the right of voting in the Roman tribes, the privilege of being under Roman law, the protection of the Empire, the right of appeal from an alien tribunal to the imperial power; and, by the Porcian and Sempronian laws, the man who enjoyed Roman citizenship could neither be bound nor scourged. Cicero says: "Facinus est vincire civem Romanum; scelus verberari." Whoever possessed this privilege,

which was alike the envy and the pride of thousands, might freely breathe the air of liberty, and proudly bid defiance to his enemies. Citizenship was the palladium of safety, and the guarantee of speedy redress from wrong.

Now taking this figure, the Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of heavenly citizenship (Phil. i. 27 ; iii. 20). The kingdom of heaven is *even now* (ὑπάρχει) our kingdom, to which as citizens we belong. Though absent in body, still we enjoy its civic privileges and protection. It is possible to live in a city, and not be a sharer in its privileges ; but while here our τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει—our freedom as citizens already exists—our kingdom is present. We are united to Christ, we are members of His mystical body, and if the Head is in heaven, so virtually are we there also. While here on earth we are only pilgrims and sojourners ; here we have no continuing city, but we are journeying to our true home, the eternal city, whose rights and prerogatives we even now enjoy. We are under the protection of the heavenly Jerusalem, we owe it true loyalty and patriotism. We owe obedience to the laws of the state of which we are subjects ; it should be our constant endeavour to conform to the will of Christ, and yield to Him a willing service. And while we have duties to perform, we have also immunities to claim. We have a right to claim, and we are encouraged to seek, Divine support and protection. The Eternal God our refuge, and beneath us His everlasting arms. In all our weary wanderings—in all our hard and fierce temptations—in our deep and painful sorrows, in our severe crosses, losses, and disappointments—there is a shield placed around us which is never withdrawn ; and in the charter of heaven we may read, "all things are yours." Not only are salvation and its blessings secured, but there is grace bestowed to enable us to partake of them.

The writing of "the name of the city of My God" upon him who should conquer would show that he belonged to the

heavenly city—that the privilege of citizenship was truly and properly his. But it is added, "the new Jerusalem, which cometh down from heaven from My God." Now what can we understand by this? A city called New Jerusalem, now in heaven, and ultimately coming down from heaven to earth after the restitution of all things? As it is now, it is the dwelling place of the redeemed. St. Paul speaks of the Jerusalem above which is free, and which is the mother of us all (Gal. iv. 26), in which passage the earthly Jerusalem is spoken of as in bondage. The Jewish Rabbins speak of the Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἄνω as an actual city, and have invested it with strange and sensuous conceptions. They regard it as the counterpart of the earthly Jerusalem in its topography and its furniture; but it is rather to be regarded as a symbol, or image, representing that spiritual city of which the Christian is even now a denizen.[1] Even Christian writers and preachers, like the late Rev. Capel Molyneux, have gone into material and sensuous views of the new Jerusalem. Speaking of the Jerusalem that now is, and contrasting it with the ἡ δὲ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλὴμ, he asks what is the Jerusalem above? "The contrast is between the present Jerusalem visible, and the present Jerusalem invisible. It is just what the word expresses—it is the Jerusalem, the city which is above. It is as *literal* as the other Jerusalem. Is there no city, think you, above? What is heaven with the many mansions of our Father's house? We believe the city of God above to be as *real* as the city of London: we believe she has her mansions and palaces as much as any other city on the face of the earth."[2]

Wherein, it may be asked, does such a notion as this differ from the description of heaven given in the Koran? Both are exactly of the same character, and are equally grotesque

[1] Schöttgen's *Hor. Hebr.*, vol. i. p. 1205, as quoted by Bishop Lightfoot.
[2] *Sermon by Rev. C. Molyneux*, on "The Heavenly Jerusalem."

and puerile. By way of adaptation, we may call heaven a city; but we have no warrant in Holy Scripture to regard it as corresponding to the earthly Jerusalem. To suppose a city actually in heaven, and literally descending from heaven, and suspended in the air over the earthly Jerusalem, this city being in the form of a cube — length, breadth, and height, equal (Rev. xxi. 16), 12,000 furlongs in extent, equivalent to 1,500 miles on its four sides—or 375 miles in height, made of pure gold, and with gates of pearls, and precious stones for foundations, and having jasper walls, needs only to be mentioned to show how liable even good and pious men have been to fall into the most ridiculous misconceptions in the interpretation of prophetic teachings. The figure of a city is emblematic of the heavenly state—and Jerusalem, the holy city, of which "glorious things are spoken," was a beautiful type of the home of the redeemed in glory. The words, *τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ*, are put in contrast to the literal Jerusalem which had been destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus, and the greater number of whose inhabitants had been slaughtered, while those who escaped the merciless sword of the conqueror had been scattered to the four winds of heaven. It has been noticed by Bengel that the form of the original word expressing Jerusalem differs when the old Jerusalem is referred to in contradistinction to the new. The latter is expressed by *Ἱερουσαλὴμ*, while the old Jerusalem is written *Ἱεροσόλυμα*. This distinction St. John keeps up, for in his gospel he always writes *Ἱεροσόλυμα* of the old city, while in the Revelation he always writes *Ἱερουσαλὴμ* of the new. The latter is the Hebrew name, the original and more holy one; the former is the Greek name, and used in a political sense.

While the old city had passed away, and the Jewish polity and commonwealth had closed, there was a home of souls for all true Israelites, for all who, like Simeon, were waiting

for the Consolation of Israel. And who could be true Israelites but those who were expecting the Messiah, and who received Him as such when He came among them? It was not the true Israelites who despised and rejected Him, for had they known the Scriptures, they would have found in Christ a complete fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. They knew not the time of their visitation, and when the true Messiah offered Himself to them they rejected Him. In this way they fell away from Christ, who was the true end and exponent of Jewish history. The true Israelite was the man who, like Nathanael, could say, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel"; or, like Philip, who brought Nathanael to Christ, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John i. 45, 49). Such true Israelites would find a city to look forward to. In the Christian Church here on earth they would find a rest and a home; and in the heavenly Jerusalem they would finally sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, heirs with them of the same promise.

"*I will write upon him the name of the city of My God.*" Are we to suppose that the name here alluded to is something yet to be disclosed, and of which we have no sure indications in Scripture? In the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, we have two distinct epithets by which the Church of God was to be distinguished in its glorified and transfigured state. In Ezek. xlviii. 35, the name is given, a name most appropriate, as any other would fall far short of expressing all that was implied in the inheritance of the saints in glory—it is "Jehovah Shammah,"—"The Lord is there." And the name is recorded in Jerem. xxxiii. 16, "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, 'The Lord, our Righteousness.'" This was a new name for the city. The Bride of Christ was to be called by the name of the Bridegroom; and

what appellation could afford greater delight to heaven's inhabitants than to have that name in which they gloried while on earth, in relation to their blessed Lord, and from which they derived special joy and comfort, now inscribed upon their foreheads, as a mark of heavenly citizenship? Of three names, therefore, we may select any one as being perfectly applicable—*Holiness to the Lord*, *The Lord is there*, and *The Lord our Righteousness*. In what sense then may Jerusalem, the City of the Redeemed, be called "New"? It would supersede the old Jerusalem, and would be subject to no decay. It would be new, because occupied by new inhabitants, or old ones made new. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature—old things are passed away, and all things are become new. Its inhabitants would be no longer the subjects of sin. Before reaching the gates of the New Jerusalem, all that defiled must have been removed, for nothing entereth in that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but only they whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. They are washed, justified, sanctified, and therefore they are prepared to enter within the city.

All creation would then be in perfect harmony, and this would make the name "New" appropriate. There would be nothing to mar the everlasting peace between earth and heaven. Redemption has had its effects upon the heavenly inhabitants, who never sinned, as well as the race which fell. Christ is Head of Redemption to man, He is Head of Preservation to angels. Man has been placed within the City of the living God, where he shall go no more out. Angels are confirmed in bliss, and no rebellion can ever be possible amongst the first created sons of God. They shall form, with the saints who have been redeemed, one family, and join with them in their ascription of praise to God and the Lamb.

Perhaps there will be new views of providence and grace. Our Lord told the disciples—"I have yet many things to say

unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"; and He also said to St. Peter, who could not understand the reason of His washing the disciples' feet, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Mysteries will then be solved, dark Providences will be unravelled, and many besides the Psalmist will be able to say, in reviewing the ways in which they were led, Surely it was good for me that I was afflicted (Ps. cxix. 71).

The word *καινὸς*, which is used here in reference to Jerusalem which is above, gives the idea of what had been made new, as contrasted with that which was old, decaying, and worn out. The word *νέος* is employed to denote what had recently come into existence.[1] Already God's people are spoken of as having come to Mount Zion, the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. xii. 22). Already are we raised up, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. ii. 6). By virtue of our incorporation into the body of Christ, who is now ascended to the highest seat of honour on God's right hand, we are already risen, and in hope seated in heavenly places. So writes St. Augustine: "In Cœlestibus Christus jam sedet, nondum autem nos. Sed quia spe certâ quod futurum est jam tenemus, simul sedere nos in Cœlestibus dicit Apostolus nos, nondum in nobis, sed jam in Illo."[2] While we look upon Christ at God's right hand, we see ourselves in heaven—our citizenship is there—our home, our country is there, and where our treasure is, our hearts should be there also. Christ has gone up to the inner sanctuary, and He has taken His people there too. The name of the Eternal City is already placed on our foreheads, and we have only to wait in patience and hope until the actual freedom of that city is conferred.

Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what

[1] Trench, *Synon. of N.T.*, sec. 60.
[2] Aug., *c. Faustum*, xi. 8.

we shall be. It is sufficient that we shall be like Christ, our Head, and be in His presence, and enjoy His love for ever. Here we are like Israel in the wilderness, in search of a home and a rest. There we shall have a rest that time shall only strengthen, when in that eternal haven we shall serenely remain at anchor, firmer than the island in mid-ocean, where the soft waves keep up an enduring requiem. And though gathered from all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, and tribes, all God's children make but one company, they all join in one anthem. There are many mansions under one roof. They are all one household, one family. How little do we see of this here; how little there is of a genuine Christian brotherhood! Rather have we to deplore party, strife, division—"Ephraim envying Judah, and Judah vexing Ephraim," until one is often ready to say, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be for ever at rest." To have the New Jerusalem in view is to get rid in a great measure of these unhappy hindrances to spiritual life and progress. The storms of life will not, cannot, touch our real selves, any more than those which sweep along the surface of the ocean can touch or agitate the depths below. Fix our eyes, blessed Jesus, upon that heavenly inheritance, so that washed in Thy blood, and sanctified by Thy Spirit, we may live daily for that world, where we shall no longer look through an imperfect medium, but where the Lord Himself shall be to us for an Everlasting Light, and our God our Glory.

καὶ τὸ ὄνομα μου τὸ καινόν. *And Mine own new name.* This is the crowning distinction which the conqueror is to have conferred upon him—Christ's own new name. To the Church at Pergamum there was to be given a white stone on which was a new name written, which no man knew but he that received it. What this new name to be bestowed upon the citizens of the New Jerusalem may be, is beyond our comprehension. To fix upon one or another of Christ's titles,

whether in the Revelation, or elsewhere mentioned in Holy Scripture, and affirm that that was the new name alluded to, would be bold presumption. When our blessed Lord has not revealed it, surely it is vain for us to conjecture. In the Revelation He is called by several names—the Alpha and Omega, the Faithful Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb,[1] the Word of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Faithful and True, the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. These are descriptive of His character, and show the relation in which He stands to us; but the name which is yet to be given is Christ's own new name. He will stand in a new relation to His people, and He will have a name corresponding, and which He here promises to the conqueror. In Rev. xix. 12, where the description of the vision of Christ as seen by the Apostle is most sublime, and where Christ is spoken of as having on His head many crowns, it is added—"And He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself." Whatever this name shall be, it shall be shared in by all who are faithful.

Whatever Christ has been to His Church in the past, there is still to come a more glorious manifestation of His character than has ever yet appeared. When Christ comes to take the kingdom to Himself and reign—when the present dispensation has closed—the new name shall be conspicuous on all who shall be pillars in the heavenly temple. It has been noticed by Stier as a remarkable coincidence in the Providential government, that the historical Philadelphia to which this promise was sent is now called by another name. Then it was "brotherly love," now it is called *Allah Shehr*,

[1] "Ἀρνίον, 'The Lamb,' is used in twenty-eight passages in this book." Note in Plumptre's *Ep. to Seven Churches*. See Introduction, where the use of Ἀρνίον instead of Ἀμνὸς, in the Revelation is referred to.

the *City of God.* May not this symbolize that change of name which Christ shall confer in His kingdom, when He shall appear as Almighty Conqueror and Universal King? In that day of His sublime manifestation, all things shall be made new (Rev. xxi. 5). There shall be a new heaven, and a new earth, a new creation, a new Jerusalem, a new song, and a new name. That state shall be new—the citizens of the New Jerusalem shall have new joys, new hopes, new pleasures, and new employments. It is apposite, therefore, that the occupants of the New Jerusalem should be called by a new name. But it is Christ's new name by which they shall be distinguished, thus showing that they belong to Him—that they are trophies of His Cross, and are now partners with Him in His crown and kingdom. And this mark of Divine approbation is not only for the Church of Philadelphia, but for all who have like faith, zeal, and patient endurance, for all who shall overcome as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

"Bring near Thy great salvation,
Thou Lamb for sinners slain,
Fill up the roll of Thine elect,
Then take Thy power and reign:
Appear, Desire of Nations,
Thine exiles long for home;
Show in the heavens Thy promised sign,
Thou Prince and Saviour come."

Ver. 13. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησιαῖς. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.* See on ii. 7.

The historian Gibbon,[1] when speaking of the overthrow of the Christian power in Asia Minor by the Turks, under Othman and his son Orchan, in the 14th century, writes as if he felt that the calamities which befell the Church

[1] Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, chap. 64, p. 141. Bohn's Brit. Classics Edit.

were in fulfilment of prophecy. We know how our Lord's predictions were verified in regard to the cities of Palestine —how literally true in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Herodian temple, which was the object of such admiration and pride to the Jewish nation—and not less apparently have His words been fulfilled in the history of Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum, His own city, which He said was exalted to heaven, but which would be thrust down to hell. So striking are the remarks of the historian, who was no friend to Christianity—and as they proceed from an unwilling witness, they bear the more weight—that we cannot overlook them. And specially his testimony in the case of the Church at Philadelphia is so greatly to the credit of that Church, which was perhaps the poorest of the seven—which had "little strength"—that we have a happy illustration of the honour God bestowed upon it because it honoured Him. After alluding to the subjugation of the kingdom of Bithynia, the historian says: "The captivity or ruin of the *seven* Churches of Asia was consummated; and the barbarous Lords of Ionia and Lydia still trample on the monuments of classic and Christian antiquity. In the loss of Ephesus, the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation; the desolation is complete and the temple of Diana, or the Church of Mary, will equally elude the search of the curious traveller. The circus and those stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardes is reduced to a miserable village; the God of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the Emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion

and freedom about fourscore years; and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and Churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same."

Philadelphia was the last of the cities of Lesser Asia to succumb to the Moslem invaders. In the fourteenth century, when the whole of that country was subjugated by Orchan, it still held out. After months of severe privation and suffering during a protracted siege, it at last surrendered to that terrible scourge of the Christians, Bajazet; and some years afterwards it was besieged and stormed by Timour, or Tamarlane, the great Mogul Emperor: but it is noteworthy, that in all its reverses, the conquerors dealt more leniently towards it than to any other city, influenced, as they seem to have been, by some superstitious feeling respecting its sanctity. May not this very circumstance be in some measure a fulfilment of the promise of protection in the hour of trial to those who had "kept the word of Christ's patience"?

Throughout the entire period of Moslem misrule and oppression of the Asiatic provinces, Philadelphia has enjoyed freedom of religious worship and other immunities which have been elsewhere withheld. The Christian Church still stands there, amidst the mosques and minarets of the False Prophet—"a strong city, with salvation for its walls and bulwarks,"—and never yet has the lamp of Truth become extinguished. Through all the vicissitudes of dynasties and empires and kingdoms, the column which commemorates the triumph of the Cross remains unshaken, because "the foundation of God standeth sure," while the rock on which the world-kingdoms have relied "is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges" (Deut. xxxii. 31).

VII.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA.

14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμὴν ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινὸς, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ.

15 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ, οὔτε ζεστός· ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἦς, ἢ ζεστός·

16 Οὕτως, ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ, καὶ οὔτε ζεστὸς οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.

17 Ὅτι λέγεις· Πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα, καὶ οὐδενὸς χρείαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος, καὶ ἐλεεινὸς, καὶ πτωχὸς, καὶ τυφλὸς, καὶ γυμνὸς,

18 Συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς, ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ, ἵνα περιβάλῃ, καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλούριον ἐγχρίσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου, ἵνα βλέπῃς.

19 Ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ, ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν, καὶ μετανόησον.

20 Ἰδοὺ, ἕστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν, καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου, καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, καὶ εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν, καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.

21 Ὁ νικῶν, δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα, καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ Πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

22 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς, ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

14 And unto the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and I have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I dearly love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and am knocking; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21 He that overcometh I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

VII.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA.

REV. iii. 14–22.

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινὸς, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ. And unto the angel of the Church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. Last in order of the Seven Churches is that of Laodicea, a city of great opulence which stood on the banks of the river Lycus, one of the many rivers which sweep down the slopes of Mount Cadmus, and all of which combine to form the Meander, that falls into the Ægean Sea close to Miletus. It was on the confines of Phrygia and Caria, and occupied a prominent position for commerce, as it stood on the great high road between Ephesus and the interior. In early times it was remarkable for its material prosperity in trade, especially for the beauty and fineness in texture of its wool, which brought large revenues to its merchant princes. Jews, in large numbers, attracted by the commercial prosperity of this city, had settled there, long before the commencement of the Christian era. Pliny speaks of the Ionian Greeks as its founders, who named it Diospolis, "the City of Jupiter," and it was afterwards called Rhoas. It is now known by the Turkish name, *Eski Hissar*, or Old Castle, and is only a heap of ruins, which, however, are enough to indicate its ancient grandeur. It was named Laodicea by Antiochus II., king of

Syria, who rebuilt it after having been almost destroyed during the wars of the successors of Alexander, and he so named it in honour of his wife, Laodice.

In Roman times it suffered in the contests between the Romans and Mithridates, king of Pontus, but it speedily rose again to power and affluence. Strabo speaks of one of its merchants, Hiero, who, at his death, bequeathed 2,000 talents to be expended for public purposes. This may throw some light on the boastful language of its people in Apostolic days—"I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Here, too, the arts and sciences were cultivated, and a great school of medicine flourished, which may have had its attractions for St. Luke, "the beloved physician," and which was presided over by some of the most distinguished successors of Galen. We are, however, more concerned with its Christian aspect, than its material or literary prestige.

Doubtless when St. Paul planted the Gospel in Ephesus, it would find its way to Laodicea, both from the central position of the city, and from the large number of Jews who had congregated there. Laodicea is not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, but we find it associated with Hierapolis and Colossæ in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, iv. 13–16. Indeed these three cities were in a cluster, Laodicea 18 miles west of Colossæ, and 6 miles south of Hierapolis. Like Philadelphia, it was greatly affected by earthquakes, and in A.D. 62, it was completely destroyed by one, but almost immediately rebuilt through the unaided opulence of its citizens.[1] In Apostolic times it must have been a city of great importance, if one can form an estimate from the grandeur and extent of its ruins, which exhibit remains of a theatre, amphitheatre—the area of the latter 1,000 feet in extent—and sculptures of various kinds.

[1] Tacitus, *Annal.*, xiv. 27. "Nullo a nobis remedio, propriis opibus revaluit."

The gospel is supposed to have been first introduced there by Epaphras, who is spoken of in Col. i. 7, as St. Paul's "dear fellow servant," and to that Church "a faithful minister of Christ," implying probably that he was also the founder of the Colossian Church. In Philemon he is mentioned as St. Paul's "fellow prisoner"; whether so designated as imprisoned like St. Paul for conducting the same Christian warfare, or as merely one who ministered to St. Paul in imprisonment, is not clearly shown. One thing is certain from Col. ii. 1, that St. Paul had never been in Laodicea when he wrote his Epistle to the Colossians, for he distinctly says that they had not seen his face in the flesh; but, through Epaphras, he had learned that false teachers had been propagating pernicious doctrines both at Laodicea and Colossæ, and to counteract their efforts, he wrote his Epistle to the Colossians, and desired them, when they had read his letter, to send it on to the Laodiceans. This clearly shows the design of St. Paul in writing his Epistles, viz. that they might be read by the Churches and circulated. In the first Epistle he wrote—that to the Thessalonians—this object he carefully kept in view, for in 1 Thess. v. 27, he says, "I adjure you by the Lord," that this Epistle be read to all the holy brethren, not merely at Thessalonica, but throughout Macedonia.

Can any Church which does not read the Holy Scriptures, or in which the Word of God is kept back from the people, be Apostolic, when such is the express teaching of St. Paul? Bengel says: "Quod Paulus cum adjuratione jubet, id Roma sub anathemate prohibet." The Epistles were addressed for the most part not to private individuals, but to Churches, and, when read, they were to be passed on to other Churches. So in Col. iv. 15, 16, "When this Epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans, and that ye read the Epistle from Laodicea" —not the letter written from Laodicea, for Col. ii. 1, shows

he had never been there—but an epistle which had been sent to Laodicea, and transmitted to Colossæ from that place.

καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε. This expression is somewhat ambiguous, for it might mean the Epistle the Apostle wrote to Laodicea, or that which the Laodiceans wrote to him, or a letter received by the Laodiceans from some other Church, which they had been directed to send on to Colossæ, as was the practice, so that the writings of the Apostles might be universally diffused throughout the Churches. These Epistles were of the same authority as the writings of Moses and the Prophets, and as the latter were read in the Synagogues, the Apostle's letters were also to be read in the Churches. There was a spurious Epistle, purporting to have been written by St. Paul to Laodicea, but it was unknown to the early Fathers; it was never found in Greek, only in Latin, and entitled "Epistola ad Laodicenses"; and from internal evidence it is clearly shown that it was a compilation taken from St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians and Ephesians, and, so far from being canonical, it was only a clumsy forgery. We may believe that the Epistle from Laodicea was St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians which had been forwarded to that place, and which the Church at Laodicea was directed to send to Colossæ. There is no trace of any lost letter of St. Paul, nor any allusion to such in the history of the early Church.

Ephesus, situate on the sea coast, was the principal city of Asia Minor. It would be natural that the Epistle addressed to it first should be sent *inland*, and as Laodicea was on the great highway to Inner Asia, the letter would come, in geographical order, to Laodicea, and thence to Colossæ; and the order from St. Paul to send the Epistle addressed to Colossæ to Laodicea, and receive another from the latter Church would indicate that it was one of his own Epistles he referred to. Neither SS. Irenæus, Ignatius, Polycarp, nor any of the early Fathers ever knew of any lost Epistle of St. Paul, or of

any canonical Epistle written directly to the Laodicean Church. There is negative evidence at least that Marcion, the heretic, wished to alter the title of the Epistle to the Church at Ephesus, and make it read "To the Laodiceans," so says Tertullian.[1] It is possible Marcion might have found in some copies of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the inscription, "To the Laodiceans," for the Ephesians were likely to send the Epistle thither, after it had been read in their own Church. But that the Epistle to the Ephesians was called by another name there is even stronger evidence than this; for Tertullian, in his book *c. Marcion*, v. 11, after coming to the Epistle to the Ephesians in the course of his writing, says: "We now come to yet another Epistle which *we* entitle the Epistle to the Ephesians, *but the heretics entitled it, to the Laodiceans.*"[2] We may therefore conclude that the Ephesians were instructed by Tychicus, the bearer of St. Paul's Epistle to them, to send it to the Laodiceans, who in their turn were enjoined to send it to the Colossians.[3]

The Angel of the Laodicean Church is considered to be Archippus, whom St. Paul had, thirty years previously, enjoined to be diligent in his ministry. "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." Epaphras had been in charge of the Church at Colossæ, but, in his absence, Archippus had been appointed to the pastoral office; and the charge which is in Col. iv. 17, applies equally to pastor and flock—to the one, to be diligent, to the other, to obey those who had the rule over them. Archippus is supposed to be Philemon's son, as he is included in the salutation given to Philemon, beloved Apphia, and the Church in Philemon's house. He may have been wanting in

[1] Tertul., *c. Marcion*, v. 11.

[2] Bp. Wordsworth, *Introd. to Epistle to Ephesians*, p. 280.

[3] The most able and exhaustive dissertation ever written on "The Epistle from Laodicea" will be found in Bp. Lightfoot's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, pp. 274–300.

zeal, though called by St. Paul "our fellow soldier," or it may be his first love had abated. If there is no advance, there must be retrogression,—"Non progredi est regredi." If the forces opposed to spiritual progress be not resisted, if we cease to go forward, seeking the things above, we shall very speedily begin to recede; and lukewarmness is only the antecedent stage to irreligion and final apostasy.

The wealth and luxury of the citizens of Laodicea seem to have produced a self-satisfied, self-righteous condition in spiritual things; and like the rich man who said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," they did not seem to feel the need of anything. It is very remarkable that the two Churches which were most highly favoured in temporal blessings were those most severely censured; while the Churches which were most afflicted, and suffered most from persecution, were those which received from the Saviour's lips the highest praise. This contrast will be clearly seen by comparing Sardis and Laodicea with Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Had Archippus, if he was Bishop at the time the message to Laodicea was sent, been mindful of the charge given by St. Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 2–5), matters never would have gone so badly as to call for the rebuke and threatenings which the Epistle to the Church at Laodicea contains. That Archippus, the same person who was warned against negligence more than a quarter of a century before, was Bishop of Laodicea, when the Apocalyptic message was sent, appears to be established as a fact from the *Apostolical Constitutions*, viii. 46, as in them it is distinctly stated that he was the first Bishop of Laodicea. His father had been one of the principal converts of Colossæ, and we may suppose it most likely that if not for his own sake, at least for his father's, he may have been selected to fill the office of

Bishop of a Church, which was only a few miles from his father's home; and it is not improbable that he was still presiding over that Church at the time of St. John's exile in Patmos. He seems not to have cared to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, but to have preferred the ease and self-seeking of a religious neutrality to a life of active effort in the cause of Christ. There may have been an adherence to the letter without the spirit, but there were no uprooting of idols from the heart, and no desire to make others partakers of the same hope which he possessed. There was a want of watchfulness, of "looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God," and that arose from a self-confident self-righteous spirit. The "Angel" of the Church does not seem to have attended to the caution given by St. Paul, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"—"Take heed to the ministry—make full proof of it"—"Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist."

The atmosphere of Laodicea seems to have had a depressing effect. There is a law of assimilation by which man becomes like the objects on which his attention is fixed. As there is what is called persistency of impression on the retina of the eye, so there is persistency of impression on the eye of the soul. When the eye was fixed on Mammon, the Laodiceans soon became lukewarm to God, and luxury and pride led them "to halt between two opinions." It is no true work that is broken through halfway. Life is a work to be completed, and whether teacher or taught, there is a work assigned to each. To Ephesus Christ said, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love;" but Laodicea had gone further on the inclined plane than this. She was in that state of base neutrality which brought the curse on Meroz (Judg. v. 23) "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse

ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty," We do not know whether the rebukes and threatenings given to Laodicea produced any effect for the time; but we do know that, in years afterwards, the Church of Laodicea was in a hopeful condition. Laodicea was raised to Metropolitan dignity, and several Councils were held under the roof of its cathedral church. One important Council was held in A.D. 363, in which the Canon of Scripture was finally settled, and the particular decree establishing the Canon was, in A.D. 451, ratified by the Council of Chalcedon. But whatever means had been taken to recover that Church from its retrograde condition, the result was only the hectic flush, which told of speedy dissolution. Long since, all traces of Christianity have perished from Laodicea—the candlestick has for centuries been removed, and the site of the once famous city is hardly discernible. The river of life sweeps on, but the very name of Laodicea is forgotten. She knew not the day of her visitation, and now she is blotted out of the registers of time, a solemn warning to Churches, as well as individuals, that it were "better never to have known the truth, than to depart from the righteous commandment delivered unto them."

Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς, κ.τ.λ., these things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness. Nowhere, except in this place, does our Lord appropriate the word, *Ἀμήν*, to himself. It is here made a proper name, but in other passages it is used by Him to express the solemn importance and truthfulness of His weighty discourses. The word, *Ἀμήν*, is rendered "verily," or "truly," and, in St. John's Gospel, it is always doubled at the commencement of the sayings of Christ, while in the other Gospels it is used singly. It belongs only to Christ to apply such a name to himself, who is the Truth. His

direction to us is "let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay," a simple affirmation or denial; but to express His authoritative declarations, which the people of that time were slow to believe, He sealed them with, Amen, Amen.

"The Amen" may not only have been adopted by our Lord with this view, but to impress upon the Jews the identity of Himself with the Jehovah Amen, of Isa. lxv. 16, or the God of Amen—the God of Truth — of the ancient Church. Twenty-five times in St. John's Gospel is the Ἀμὴν, Ἀμὴν, found at the beginning of our Lord's discourses. He is the personal Truth, when compared with His messengers, who merely communicated the truth made known to them by Him.

He is the "Amen," because whatever He says is true—His promises and threatenings are alike reliable—there is no fickleness in His purposes, or feebleness in their execution. When He speaks, let all mankind listen, and "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." The Church at Laodicea, wise in her own conceit, and puffed up with her own self-sufficiency, might be disposed to question any statement affecting the position in which she stood before God; but the Head of the Church will show her how hollow her profession has been; He will strip from life its tinselled ornaments, and He will lay bare her real state as that of self-deception in the presence of Him unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid. He will, therefore, preface the rebuke which He has to convey by proclaiming Himself as the "Amen." It is as if He would say, "It is I, the Eternal Truth, who speak, who know you better than you know yourselves—shall the potsherds of the earth strive with their Maker? wilt thou maintain thy cause against Me?" The Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of all the promises of God in Christ, Yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God. No variableness, nor shadow of turning

in the great verities of the gospel—whatever God hath promised in Christ shall be confirmed by Christ—their Amen, or verification, is therefore indisputable.[1]

But to prevent any misconception as to His meaning, He reiterates the expression in a simpler form—in fact, He gives the Hebrew word its proper signification—*the faithful and true Witness.* In chap. i. 5, He is called "the faithful Witness"—here the faithful and true. It might be thought that He, who was love itself, was too tender and merciful either to threaten or to punish; but in order to be "faithful and true," the sterner side, in dealing with the weaknesses and and faults of Churches, must not be overlooked. Perfect love is no less apparent in correction than in praise; and if, for the purpose of correcting the false estimate which the Church of Laodicea had formed of its own position, it was found needful to warn, reprove, rebuke, it was an act of love and mercy towards that Church to come with the rod, so as to raise it from its lethargy and lukewarmness, and, if possible, save it from spiritual decay and dissolution. Christ, when He speaks to that Church, does so with authority. He came to bear witness to the truth. Nature and conscience might speak, the one externally, the other to the inner man; but man needed a better light than both. There are dark and inexplicable mysteries in nature, there are mazes which conscience in vain tries to disentangle; but Christ has spoken with a certainty and reality which have put everything connected with man's present and eternal destiny beyond con-

[1] Canon Westcott thus explains the "Amen, Amen," which we meet so frequently in the Gospel of St. John :—"The phrase is found in the New Testament only in the Gospel of St. John (who never gives the simple *Amen*) and (like the simple *Amen* in the Synoptists) it is used only by Christ. The word, *Amen*, is represented by *in truth* or *truly*, in Luke iv. 25; ix. 27. In the LXX. the original word is retained only in responsive phrases (Neh. v. 13; viii. 6). Elsewhere it is represented, "be it so" (*γένοιτο*), Ps. xli. 13; lxxii. 19; lxxxix. 52. The word is properly a verbal adjective "firm," "sure." Comp. Isa. lxv. 16 (*God of the Amen.* LXX., *ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ἀληθινός*) Rev. iii. 14 (*the Amen*)."—Westcott, *Comm. on St. John's Gospel*, i. 51, p. 28.

jecture. He has borne testimony regarding the character and moral government of God. He has spoken of the infinite evil of sin, and man's moral impotence, and how, through Himself, man's need, wide as humanity itself, could be satisfied—how God could be just and the justifier of them who believe in His Son. "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is the authority which supersedes that of all human teachers, because there is a certainty here which chases away all surmises from the soul, and places those problems, we are most concerned to know, regarding life and immortality, plainly and intelligibly before us. And when He speaks, He never thinks of whether truth is palatable or otherwise; He never adapts himself to circumstances, holding back what would be likely to displease, and enunciating only what would be acceptable to those addressed. When we hear some teachers, they speak as men of a craven spirit, and sometimes when truth should be told, they flatter and deceive until the soul sickens, and we feel as if truth had perished from the face of the earth. When we begin to seek for compromise between truth and error, to promote some social *eirenicon*, it is like halting between two opinions whether we should serve God or Baal; and like the resultant of two forces thus acting at right angles, going diagonally, we are led aside from the true course into one of lifeless neutrality, which differs little from positive abnegation of the truth.

Now our blessed Lord was the faithful and true Witness, because He paid no deference to the prejudices or prepossessions of the people. See in the Sermon on the Mount, how he feared not to sweep away the false tenets of Judaism, which had been woven into the very life of the people, and had been sanctioned by the approval of a venerable antiquity, "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, but I say unto you." He never courted the applause of the people, nor did He strive to secure success in His mission

by pandering to their feelings, failings, or faults. But in one particular point He differed from all who went before Him, namely, in speaking the truth in love. Even over guilty Jerusalem, which was foully stained by the blood of the prophets, and whose inhabitants were preparing to imbrue their hands in His own, in deep emotion He shed tears, and in accents of inexpressible tenderness He exclaimed, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not" (Matt. xxiii. 37).

In love not merely for the Church or the nation, but for individuals, we see this faithful witnessing to the truth manifested. We see it in His dealings with Mary Magdalene, with the woman of Samaria, and above all in the home at Bethany. The philosopher would lay down his dry and rigid propositions, but to yield to any tenderness of feeling was a thing to which he was a stranger; not so the Great Teacher, who taught with Divine authority: there was a deep love for the souls of the people with whom He came into contact; and we see this feature most clearly in the case of Laodicea: for when He reproves it for its lukewarmness, we hear Him say, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, etc. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent." He was the Witness of the everlasting love of God to man; and while He has the most tender compassion for the sinner, he does not cease to testify against the sin. He knew what was in man, and he speaks what He knows, and testifies what He has seen. Archbishop Trench notices that the word πιστοί may be taken in either an active or a passive sense, meaning "trusting" or "trustworthy." In the latter sense it can only apply to God. We may and do exercise faith, but God never does; we may be trustworthy, God is always so; and it is in this latter sense that the word "faithful" can be applied to Him.

ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ, *the beginning of the creation of God.* The Greek word, ἀρχὴ, means the origin, the first cause, not, as Arians would interpret it, the first of God's creation. If we turn to Col. i. 15, Christ is there called the image of the invisible God, πρωτότοκος πασῆς κτίσεως, the first begotten before every creature. He was begotten before all creation as God's eternal Son, and the πρὸ (the preposition in πρωτότοκος) shows that it is to be taken in this sense, for it governs πασῆς κτίσεως in the genitive. The verse which follows clearly shows this to be the meaning: not that Christ was a Creature, but the Creator; "for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities (ἀρχαὶ), or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him" (Col. i. 16). It is further stated, "and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." πρὸ πάντων, *before all things;* and if so, how could it be said that He was the first of God's creatures? As Theodoret puts it, "not as if He had the creature as a brother, but as being born before any creature. For how can He be a brother of creatures, and yet their Creator, as the Apostle here declares Him to be?" He is "begotten, not made," as the Nicene Creed has it; and, if not made therefore not a creature.

The word ἀρχὴ indicates also supreme power or sovereignty, corresponding to the Latin word, "Principalitas;" ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἀσίας, for example; so while Christ is the Initial Cause, the source and spring of all things, He is also the Head of all things—all things are placed under His supremacy—"All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth." Angels and Archangels are under His supreme Headship. It might be considered, because He was man, that Angelic natures were above Him; but, even in His Manhood, He is their Lord, and He has raised human nature to the highest honour

and dignity that it is possible to reach; so in Ps. viii. 5–7, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him? . . . Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands." Also in Ps. lxxxix. He is spoken of as having sovereignty over all the kings of the earth.

The two ideas then which are involved in ἀρχὴ are priority to all creation, and sovereignty over all creation; the one indicating absolute pre-existence, the other universal supremacy. In the Book of Proverbs, viii. 22, Personal Wisdom is called ἀρχὴ ὁδῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ—the "beginning," or rather "beginner," of the ways of God. To speak of Christ as the first of God's creatures would be to falsify the whole *consensus* of Holy Scripture; for He is acknowledged as "Creator" in John i. 1–3; in 1 Cor. viii. 6; Col. i. 15–18; Eph. iii. 9; Rev. v. 13; and many other passages. But why does Christ call Himself ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ here? What connexion has this with the other title, *the faithful and true Witness?*

We have already shown how the Laodiceans, wise in their own conceits, considered themselves as wanting nothing, as being absolutely perfect; but the Searcher of hearts would lay "judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and sweep away the refuges of lies." He would testify against them as to their danger, and rouse them from their spiritual stupor to consider their true state before God. But now the figure is changed, and the all-glorious Creator is introduced, to remind them that every good gift, and every perfect gift, comes down from above—that satisfaction and confidence in themselves were vain—that they possessed nothing that they had not received from Him who is the Ἀρχὴ, the originating Source of all things, who was before all time, and the Spring of all life, whether natural or spiritual, the ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς, the Prince of

Life, and therefore they should come and buy of Him the good things they really wanted; otherwise, instead of being in need of nothing, as they supposed, they should find themselves in the lowest and saddest condition of spiritual destitution, strangers to Christ and aliens from God. The title Christ here adopts may also have been chosen to condemn the false teaching which then existed at Laodicea, and which was closely related to the tenets St. Paul stigmatizes in the Colossian Church, viz.: Angelology, and the worship of angels as inferior deities, or mediators with God, thereby disparaging the Divinity of Christ, and slighting His mediatorial office.

There had been on the part of certain Judaizing teachers a strong effort made to subvert the faith of the people from the simplicity of the gospel, and to lead them back to what is called, *τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα*, the weak and beggarly elements of Judaism, and thereby unchristianize them—for enjoining those practices which were followed by the Essenes and Pharisees was only a step towards heathenism—and therefore Christ would show the Church at Laodicea that He was the Creator of all things, and at the Head of the Universe—that all mediatorial authority and power were in Him, and that this will-worship and voluntary humility were derogatory to His dignity and office as Head over all things to His Church. These false teachers would probably try to persuade the Church at Laodicea, as at Colossæ, that man in his fallen condition needs Angels as Mediators through whom God is to be approached, and they would say that God had employed Angels in revealing His will to patriarchs and prophets, and that the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai by the ministry of Angels; but Christ, the One Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. ii. 5), would tell them that man's necessities are all met in Him—that through Him both Jew

and Gentile have access, by one spirit, unto the Father, and that no man comes unto the Father but through Him. They should, therefore, abandon such heathenish notions, and come directly to Him in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and they should find true rest for their souls.

Man needs no Mediator but Christ, nor could there be any found to assume such an office, as no one could occupy the position of Mediator in heaven who did not make atonement for sin on earth. In the Jewish tabernacle and temple there were two altars—the brazen altar for the sacrifices, and the golden altar for incense. Now the coals with which the censer on the golden altar were heated were taken from the altar of sacrifice; and until the propitiatory sacrifice was offered, there could be no incense presented before God. It was so arranged that on the Day of Atonement, the sacrifice was first offered, then the high priest went to the golden altar, and having the censer heated by the fire that consumed the sacrifice, he carried the incense within the veil, and made intercession. So our blessed Redeemer, having first made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, ascended on high, and entered within the veil, bearing the marks of suffering in His glorified body, and ever living to make intercession for us.

None but Christ can say, "I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." None but He has power with God and can prevail. It is He alone whose plea is founded on a basis which can never be shaken, and in regard to whom every true believer can adopt the calm and assured language of the Apostle: "If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins." The prayers of all saints are perfumed with the incense of His merits, and

we know that Him the Father heareth always. We stand in need of none but Jesus; for just as on the Day of Atonement no voice within the veil was heard but that of the high priest—he alone stood, and pleaded, and sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat—so no Mediator of intercession but Jesus within the precincts of that heavenly temple is required—neither saint nor Angel—to plead for the scattered Church in the wilderness of this world. "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; and in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." The Laodicean Church might therefore firmly rely upon Him who was the *ἀρχὴ*, and if they would share in His salvation, they must not derogate from the dignity, power, and all-sufficiency of His Mediatorial character and work.

Ver. 15. *Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ, οὔτε ζεστός· ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἦς, ἢ ζεστός. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.* The works here alluded to were of a purely negative character. There was certainly religious profession. The people of Laodicea had named the name of Christ, and professed to be His followers; but their lives showed no practical holiness. There was no zeal or enthusiasm in their Christianity. They resembled cold statues more than living men; yet there was a little life, but not enough to set the mechanism in motion—they were neither fervid on the one hand, nor icy cold on the other; and if they followed Christ at all, they followed Him afar off. What produced this intermediate state of religion which was neither hot nor cold? The cause is not far to seek; for when we think of the worldly prosperity of the people of Laodicea, and the wealth which seems to have been accumulated there, we may

suppose that many of the Laodicean Christians belonged to the opulent class, and the tendency of affluence has been always to make men forget God. They increase in pride and self-sufficiency as riches increase, unless the grace of God is given to keep them humble, and to lead them to see at every turn of life, that all things are of God, and that in proportion as outward prosperity is apparent, responsibility for the proper use of our talents is proportionally increased. If there had ever been genuine love it was now waxing cold, and if some immediate effort was not made to resuscitate the dying embers, the very name of Christianity should be obliterated from Laodicea.

There are two extremes in religion equally to be avoided—absolute indifference on the one side, and fanatic zeal on the other. The "cold" are not those who have never made any profession, for such could not come under the category of Christians at all; but the word implies that, while they are numbered amongst the Lord's people, their hearts have never yet been touched by grace, but are still hard as the nether millstone. They are like those described in Ezek. xxxiii. 31: "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness." The light of heaven illuminates the world, but they see it not; the sun diffuses warmth in his beams on every side, but they are unaffected as the glacier on some Alpine summit; warnings, exhortations, entreaties, fall upon their ears unheeded; and unless God takes them in hand, and has mercy in store for them, their hard hearts will become still more obdurate through the deceitfulness of sin, until, through grieving, resisting, and finally quenching the Spirit, the dread sentence issues as in the days of the prophet: "Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone." "Better never to have known the

way of righteousness than after having known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." They stand like barren trees, in those gardens enclosed by grace from the wilderness of the world, withering daily, unaffected by rain or sunshine, until, seared and dead, they are removed to make way for others. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, and even such as those whose hearts are cold as icicles, His grace can melt, and make receptacles of His love.

On the other hand, there may be religious zeal bordering on fanaticism. There may be excessive enthusiasm, which is only another word for frenzy. This condition is the opposite extreme. Generally, when such occurs, it is shortlived. Like the rapid torrent which sweeps down the mountain side—and which may be produced by the thunder shower—rushing impetuously and making itself heard a long way off, there is too frequently the noisy profession, which excitement has occasioned, and which suddenly dies out when the excitement is withdrawn. Like Jonah's gourd, it comes up in a night and perishes in a night. This religion of high-sounding claims—and which works on the feelings, that are as fickle as an April sky—however full of enthusiasm, is not all that God requires us to possess. It is the calm assured faith which, like some deep river, flows smoothly on, widening gradually, and hollowing out its channel as it nears the ocean, and producing verdure on every side. On the part of the disciple who wrote the message to the Church of Laodicea, there was once a fervour, which our Lord checked; for this Son of Thunder, with his brother, had desired to call down fire from heaven and consume the Samaritans who refused to receive his Master; and we are told how Jesus rebuked the sons of Zebedee, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." When we see fanaticism, whether in open hostility to the truth, or perverting the truth to the detriment of men's souls, it is not

to be regarded as fervent zeal, but the outcome of feverish excitement, the product of a "heat-oppressed brain," alike injurious to faith and to morals.

By the word "hot," then, we are to understand those whose hearts were influenced with spiritual fervour, who were warmed with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and in whom the love of God was shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. We can easily apprehend the relative wish here expressed by Christ, in so far as the alternative of the Church's being "hot" was concerned; but there is less clearness when He says, "Would that thou wert cold." He who is lukewarm is one who has tasted the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come, and yet there is no love kindled in the heart. He seems to be a professor of religion, but it has not touched the secret springs of action; his will is uninfluenced, and therefore the rudder of the soul is not in gear to drive the ship. Like Balaam, he will neither bless nor curse. Like the worshippers of Mount Carmel, he stands halting between two opinions. He is not far from the kingdom of God, yet he never thinks of venturing in—he is almost a Christian, and altogether a worldling—he professes love to Christ, but in works he denies Him—his pretence is on the side of religion, but his heart and soul are engrossed with the world.

There is a want of earnestness, which is considered by some to be allowable in religion, but in nothing else besides. The man of the world rises early and sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness; the ancient athlete exercised a severe discipline to fit him for striving in the stadium; the merchant, the mechanic, the husbandman, are all alive to those special seasons that will advance the objects they have in view. They do it for a corruptible crown; and yet we, who are running as in a racecourse for an immortal crown, halt and get weary, and frequently sit down, forgetful of our destination. Is the salvation of the soul not of equal importance

with the material interests of man? Some think here they may go with the tide, and drift safely to the eternal shore; but the forces which are at work in the outer world will never insure the safety of the soul. They will break on the shores of time, and make shipwreck of our hopes; they will never carry us away to the haven of rest, where, in the bosom of Jesus, no storm or tempest can ever overtake us.

Life is a work for eternity, and we cannot afford to stand all the day idle. Our individual exertions now will not fail to impart a complexion to our future destiny. What our hands find to do should be done with all our might. Our heaven must be begun here, if we would realize the beatific vision of Christ hereafter. What infatuation, what reckless folly, to occupy that neutral position in this life that it cannot be seen whose we are and whom we serve? Is it not a spectacle fit to make the very angels weep, to perceive graces languishing and lethargic lukewarmness dulling the energy of devotion; and thus to see men standing as listless spectators, instead of earnest workers for God? They may think that any work done for God, any holy impulse heavenwards, perishes, but it is not so. Philosophers tell us that if a single grain of sand could be projected into space beyond the earth's attraction, it would exercise an effect upon the most distant planet; so the humblest effort for Christ will not be unnoticed. No pure thought, no good resolve, no loving act, will go forth in vain.

By the lukewarm, the voice of Heaven may be heard, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." That light will act like a torch carried into the battlefield at night, or like a flash of lightning on the crew of some shipwrecked vessel. It will dispel illusions, it will reveal the true state of the soul, and exhibit its naked deformity. Lukewarmness is akin to doubting; because if we only felt the power of religion within, we should not be unconcerned, but cry out with one of old, who,

when the scales fell from his eyes, said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Doubt is not a healthy condition of the soul; it dishonours Christ, it is a stumbling-block to weak brethren. It is not sufficient that through doubt and darkness we enter the kingdom; "yet so as by fire," is an unenviable salvation. There is pride at the root of doubt; for men look within themselves for a reason of assurance which they cannot find, instead of looking out of themselves to Christ and resting upon His sufficiency. While we doubt we continue apathetic, and it should always be our aim to rise above these mists, which are of the earth earthy, and on the wings of faith get into the serene region where Christ dwells, and with our eyes fixed on Him, we shall soon be able to say, "I know in whom I have believed." Then we shall adorn the doctrine of Christ and recommend it to the world, and show to those who are around us that "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace."

But what does our Lord mean by the exclamation, "*I would thou wert cold or hot*"? It cannot be supposed that He would prefer a condition of absolute unbelief to one in which faith had been once manifest, but was now feeble, and where love was languishing. To have no faith at all would surely not be a better alternative than to have some feeble remnants of it to mark that it once was there. Christ will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed; and lukewarm as the Church of Laodicea was, He will, in His mercy and His love, still fan the flame of love, and bring its members to repentance, if they will.

Better for the Church of Laodicea not to have had the knowledge of the truth, than resting self-satisfied on that bare fact, to sit in indolence, apathy and stolid indifference; for he that knew his Lord's will and did it not, was beaten with many stripes, while he that knew not, and did com-

mit things worthy of stripes, was beaten with few stripes (Luke xii. 48). There would be more hopefulness of the conversion of one who has not known the truth, than one who had known it and abused it, or turned a deaf ear to it. Besides, none do more injury to the cause of Christ's gospel than lukewarm professors. They make a profession of Christianity, and they rest in the name of Christian, but they bring discredit upon that sacred name by heartless neutrality, or inconsistent lives. There is gross dishonesty here, and whatever may be the high sounding name, it is like the snow covering the mounds where the dead are laid—a fair pretence, but inwardly full of corruption and deceit. There is a meanness in the man who is "a hypocrite in mask," and clothes himself with the robes of heaven for the service of Satan; and an open enemy would be always preferable to a false friend. If a man is earnest, whether right or wrong, there is respect for him—one admires his zeal, his sincerity, his tenacity of purpose; and if he go in a wrong direction, there is still hope that the good and loving Saviour who turned the water into wine at Cana, may, in His own time, change the natural faculties which have got a warp in a mistaken course, into those of a higher order, producing fruit that will ultimately redound to the glory of God. When Saul of Tarsus was going to Damascus in his mad zeal—a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious—there was no hypocrisy or insincerity in him. He was honest, he was earnest, but he was ignorant; and there was more hope of his conversion when instructed, than there could ever be of such a person as Judas, though one of the Twelve. The latter was essentially mean—he was a backslider and a traitor; and though numbered amongst the Apostles, and under the personal ministry of Christ, he remained a hardened hypocrite, of whom nothing could be expected. The effect of the gospel upon him was "a savour of death unto death." The longer he lived the more the evil

heart of unbelief departed from the living God, he fell farther from grace, and like sunshine and rain upon a lifeless tree, the gifts of God's Providence, which brought others to repentance, only involved him deeper and deeper in spiritual decay.

We find that during our Lord's ministry on earth, it was never from the lukewarm he obtained any of His followers; even a Mary Magdalene is reclaimed, while the indifferent Scribes and Pharisees go further and further from the kingdom of God. We can therefore understand what the force of our Lord's words was when He exclaimed: "*I would thou wert cold or hot;*" as a lukewarm condition was the most hopeless and deplorable state in which professing Christians could be found, a wretched caricature of religion, which was blinding the minds of men with self-satisfaction and deception.

Ver. 16. *Οὕτως, ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ, καὶ οὔτε ζεστὸς οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of My mouth.* Laodicea's state was one of confirmed lukewarmness; it seems to have gone beyond a temporary or transitional form, and that being so, there is nothing left but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. The expression is very strong, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." Like lukewarm water, which has the tendency to produce nausea, so the moral and spiritual condition of this Church was such as to occasion moral loathing. In Ps. lv. 12, where the Psalmist is speaking of Absalom's revolt, and in connexion with which Ahithophel is introduced, he rebukes the latter in these words: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me, then I would have hid myself from him; but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and my ac-

quaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company."

The most intense disgust is created when one who professes friendship, and has been tried and trusted, turns recreant. It is impossible to repose any confidence in the deceiver afterwards; and an open enemy is much more to be welcomed than he who has proved himself a traitor. The latter is blind to his own delinquencies, and having lost all sense of shame, and become lost to principle and honour, the last state of that man is worse than the first. There was no further use in expostulation; the harvest was past, and the summer ended; and now the dreadful threatening is about to be carried into execution. Yet there is one ray of mercy still remaining. There is a short respite before the judgment shall issue. If even now, though their hearts were frozen like the iceberg, they will rouse themselves to repentance, the long suffering compassion which spared Nineveh will be extended here, although Laodicea had sinned against light. The words in the Greek are μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι, *I am about to spue thee out of My mouth*, unless you lay aside your self-sufficiency and divest yourself of self-deceit. This form of expression Bengel calls *modalis sermo*, when what is categorical is expressed with some intimation respecting the mode in which the thing is to be done. He implies the denial which is about to take place in the event of their continuing "lukewarm," before His Father.[1] The threatening is clear, that if they continue in the same condition in which Christ then found them, they shall be cast off as a Church.

It is to be noted that the adjectives ψυχρὸς and ζεστὸς are in the masculine gender, showing that the Angel or Bishop of the Church is the person addressed, not however individually, but as the representative of the Church, because he is respon-

[1] Bengel, *On Apoc.*, pp. 215, 417.

sible for the souls of the people, if he has not warned them of their danger (Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8). He may have been "lukewarm" as well as the people, and if, as we have before supposed, Archippus was the Angel of the Church at Laodicea, it was with a prescient mind and a well-formed estimate as to the character of the son of Philemon, St. Paul gave the injunction, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. iv. 17).

The inhabitants of Canaan had been dealt with in previous times as Laodicea was now, in regard to punishment. The sins of the people had brought down God's judgment. The land was defiled by their abominations, and God said to His people Israel, "Ye shall keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you, . . . that the land spue not you out also when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you" (Lev. xviii. 26, 28). Now the Church at Laodicea was in like manner to be rejected. There was a name to live, but no more; and what more revolting, in the presence of God who searcheth the heart, than a hollow conformity to religion, while the conscience was seared as with a hot iron, and while the heart felt no spiritual emotion towards God. Falsehood and hypocrisy had seated themselves in the inmost shrine of the soul, and the secret rejection of sacred truth, with a seeming acquiescence in the profession of it, was the climax of self-degradation, and told too plainly that the time of Laodicea's visitation in judgment was at hand.

Ver. 17. *Ὅτι λέγεις· Πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδενὸς χρείαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος, καὶ ἐλεεινὸς, καὶ πτωχὸς, καὶ τυφλὸς, καὶ γυμνὸς. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and I have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and*

miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. There are two points to be noticed here: (1) the Laodiceans' estimate of themselves; and, (2) Christ's description of their true character.

The Church had a high opinion of its status, and seemed to consider itself in need of nothing. When it said, "I am rich, and have gotten riches," are we to suppose it was boasting of its outward condition as regards worldly prosperity? This boast would have been quite true. Laodicea, as has been already noticed (ver. 1), was the wealthiest in worldly riches of the seven Churches, while Philadelphia was the poorest; but if the reference in this verse was to outward prosperity, the contrast which follows could not properly apply. At the same time when riches increase, and people set their hearts upon them, they have the effect of making them forget God. They draw away the mind from God, and lead men to suppose they are in need of nothing, dependent for nothing, and that all that they have is the result of their own ability, energy, and skill.

Mammon, the most crooked of the spirits that fell, is a god that men very extensively worship. It was so in the days when our blessed Lord was on earth, and some of His most withering rebukes are directed against such mean idolatry. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of God," was His observation after the young ruler had gone away sorrowing, because Christ told him to exercise self-denial (Mark x. 21). So too, in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, etc. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. vi. 20, 21). He asks with overwhelming power: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" and to His disciples He said, with pointed emphasis, "Beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"

(Luke xii. 15). It is not incompatible with the religion of Christ that a man should have wealth, or that a society of men should have material prosperity. The friends of Christ were in the household of Cæsar, and a Joseph of Arimathea, and a Centurion, and a Nicodemus, were men of good position in society. It is only when riches are made the end of man's existence, when the production of wealth is regarded as the chief object of life, that they become a snare to lead men to perdition. If we are to imitate our Great Master, there must be self-sacrifice and self-consecration to Him. There must be presented to the enchantment which chains us to the world a counter-enchantment which will draw us upward to God. We have that in Christ's redeeming love; for He said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

The boast of the Laodicean Church did not refer to outward things. It was an absence of poverty of spirit; it spoke of a self-sufficiency and self-deception, which were alike dishonouring to God and perilous to the souls of men. They had a persuasion that there was something good within them, and, acting upon that persuasion, they said they wanted nothing. This condition reminds one forcibly of some in "these last days" who have laid claim to possess such an assurance of salvation that they need no longer pray for forgiveness, for they commit no sin to be forgiven, and being "saved," they no more need the ordinances of religion and means of grace. Like those whom the Apostle reproves (1 Cor. iv. 8), on account of their presumptuous notions of perfection reached all at once, they stand before the world self-condemned by spiritual pride and self-sufficiency. How censorious too they are of others! The tongue which is "an unruly evil" is ever ready to slander and revile those who in the eye of God, it may be, are far superior to themselves. "Ye,"

said the Apostle to the Church at Corinth, "are full; ye are rich to satiety—What then ought we your spiritual parents be? But what is the fact? God has put us forth *last* in the Christian race, while ye imagine yourselves to be first; we are appointed to death, while ye sit as spectators and reign as kings! And we are patient and bless Him. If such is our case, ye may be sure that pride and vainglory and self-confidence, such as yours, are no fit badges of Christians."[1] This irony of the Apostle comes forcibly upon the Corinthians, who had got into a state of self-satisfaction, and might be well and carefully noticed by some of the same class in the present day.

In the Old Testament there is a similar boast to that of Laodicea, and it is supposed that reference is made to it in the message of the blessed Saviour (Hosea xii. 8), "I am become rich, I have found me out substance; in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." The people of Israel flattered themselves that, inasmuch as everything succeeded with them, God was favourable, and the result of this notion was that they turned a deaf ear to the prophets and their reproofs; because, they said, if God were not propitious, He never would have advanced them to so high a degree of worldly prosperity. "I am become rich," and I am quite satisfied with my lot, and I care nothing for what the prophets may say.[2] They went on to say they were free from every fault and vice, because the outward tokens of blessing were so obvious. If they had only thought of what Solomon said (Prov. xxv. 14), "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain," they would perhaps have hesitated before they turned the gifts of God against Himself, and began to reject His counsel, because He had dealt so leniently and generously to them. It is nothing

[1] Bishop Wordsworth, *Notes on* 1 *Cor.* iv. 8.
[2] Calv., *Com. on Hos.* xii. 8.

short of daring impiety, when men thus recklessly set themselves against God—when the goodness of God does not lead them to repentance—and when they think that worldly prosperity is a token of spiritual blessing; that in the ratio of good fortune in the things of this life, the favour of God must also be. Such people forget the corollary our Lord deduced from the parable of the rich fool: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The prosperity of the Church of Laodicea in temporals had the effect, like as in the time of the prophet who has been referred to, of making it satisfied that the riches of the Saviour's grace were as largely enjoyed as worldly riches. The Church has never gained much by material prosperity. In the days of Constantine, when maintained by state support, we have abundant proof that although the sunshine of outward prosperity shone upon her, she lost considerably in spirituality. There is always a tendency, when affluence is enjoyed, to have our graces weakened; and it is not less true as regards Churches than it is as regards nations, that luxury and wealth lead to effeminacy, because they engender ease and self-satisfaction.

The expression "Thou sayest, I am rich," refers specially to the high estimate the Laodicean Church had of its *spiritual* attainments; and there could not be found a more forcible illustration of the deceptive character of feeling than that which we have here. There are many who feel certain inner persuasions regarding their state before God, which are as adverse to their real character as darkness to light. "If a man say he hath faith and have not works, can faith save him?" asks St. James (ii. 14); and if a man says he feels he is saved, and neglects the ordinances of religion and despises the means of grace, prays for no forgiveness, but considers himself perfect as an Angel of God, can this feeling save him? Whatever may be his feeling, or his profession, unless he shows his love to Christ by walking in His commandments,

by crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, by maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, his character is not that of the Christian as set forth in Holy Scripture. What is the use of calling Christ, Lord! Lord! and not doing the things which He says? We should always remember that the heart is deceitful, and that he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; and our good feelings, if they are leading us to run counter to the written Word, are only the fanciful chimeras of a vain imagination. Feelings are so liable to change that, like the sky, which may be bright at noontide, but clouded an hour afterwards, they are not a safe index of a Christian's hope. Take any saint of either dispensation, and on inquiring into the nature of his religious experience as derived from his feelings, we shall find him at one time rejoicing in God, at another crying out, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" At one time rising with an assured faith to say, "I know in whom I have believed," and again even an Apostle fearing lest when preaching to others he himself should be rejected.

There has been no truth more perverted than the inward consciousness of a sinner's hope. Mere excitement of the overwrought feelings of people of nervous temperament has been supposed to be the work of grace, and fanaticism has, in certain cases, resulting from such excitement, brought contempt upon religion. At the same time although truth may be, and often has been, perverted, we are not to ignore, or speak slightingly of it. If we have a good hope through grace, we cannot but be conscious of it. St. Paul speaks of the hope that maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost (Rom. v. 5); but this hope, or rather the consciousness of it, may vary in the same person at different times. It is impossible to pass from death unto life, and know nothing of this

change. It might with as much reason be said that the blind man (John ix.) who was restored to sight, or Lazarus who was raised from the dead, had no consciousness of it. But while this is admitted, there must be evidence that the feeling or consciousness is founded upon a sound basis. "Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as Christ is pure" (1 John iii. 3). He will glorify God in his body and in his spirit which are His. He will come to the house of God with them that keep holy day, and show forth the praises of Him who hath called him from darkness into His marvellous light; and instead of carping censoriousness, which magnifies the mote in a brother's eye—self-sufficiency, which exclaims, "I have need of nothing,"—and Pharasaic exclusiveness being exhibited with an assumed air of superiority which seems to say, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou,"—he will lead his weak and erring brother or sister to the great Master, tell the story of His redeeming love, and show the fulness of that grace and mercy which is in Christ to meet the wants of every downcast and desponding soul.

The Church at Laodicea considered itself perfectly safe, but at that very moment it was in the last stage of moral decrepitude and decay, that was soon to be followed by the candlestick being removed out of its place. They thought themselves the favoured of heaven and in need of nothing. They were exalted above measure through self-satisfied pride, and like Agag before Samuel, they seemed to say, "Surely the bitterness of death is past"; but in the view of Christ they were wretched (ταλαίπωροι) above all others, miserable (ἐλεεινοὶ), objects of extremest pity, and poor (πτωχοὶ); while in the possession of the greatest riches yet spiritually poor indeed, because their hearts were not rich toward God; and blind (τυφλοὶ), like the Pharisees (John ix. 40), who said to Christ "Are we blind also?" and to whom He replied, "If ye

were blind, ye should have no sin, but now ye say We see; therefore your sin remaineth,"—and naked (γυμνοὶ); they were in the filthy rags of their own self-righteousness, and as such unfit to stand in the presence of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Ver. 18. Συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς, ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ, καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλούριον ἐγχρίσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου, ἵνα βλέπῃς. *I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see.* Did not our Lord tell the Church in the preceding verse, that it was in the most abject poverty and wretchedness? and surely it sounds like cruel irony to hear the people counselled to "buy," when we may regard them as in a state of bankruptcy. The merchant princes of Laodicea were familiar with the usages of trade; buying and selling and getting gain were the things that were foremost in their thoughts; and yet they were spending their money for nought, and their labour for that which did not satisfy. Christ tells them to buy of Him, and we see at once that it is the pearl of great price He desires them to secure. It is neither the beautiful wools of Laodicea, nor changes of garments of the finest texture, nor unguents of the most precious rarity and the most priceless value, that He counsels them to trade in. He tells them He has something to sell them far above all these. Gold that will not perish in the using, or make to itself wings and flee away; raiment which will make them acceptable in the presence of the Great King; and *ointment* which if applied will remove every film of obscurity from their eyes, and enable them not only to see themselves as God sees them,

but to see the things which belong to their soul's everlasting peace.

One would think that, with such offers presented, with such prospects before them, they would cry out at once with the Apostle, "Lord, to whom shall we go" (but to Thee)? "Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John vi. 68).

There was a further reason why they should come and buy from Him; for, although in some respects they had to contribute towards the acquisition of these incomparable possessions, in another sense they were to be had without money and without price; they had to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Christ; they had to renounce their self-righteousness, and, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, say, "The things which were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." They must get rid of their fancied self-sufficiency, and, like the publican of old, come to Him, saying, "God be merciful to us sinners!" and shall they be sent empty away? He in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily would satisfy their mouths with good things,—"they should not be ashamed in the evil time, and, in the days of famine, they should have enough." The poor man who had no earthly riches, might come here and be made rich in faith and good works. He might say, "I have nothing to offer Thee, blessed Lord, but myself: take my heart, make it Thy temple; take my soul, and wash it in Thy blood; take my body, make it the habitation of Thy Spirit; and so in body, soul, and spirit preserve me blameless till Thy coming and kingdom." What is the gold tried in the fire, but faith that would stand the test of tribulation, that would rise with each difficulty, and, like that of the Patriarch of Uz, cry out in calm confidence, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Possibly the Church at Laodicea supposed that these spiritual attainments were hers already. The proud boast,

"I am rich," implied as much. But he that is vain of his high spiritual attainments has least to boast of; for in proportion as one grows in grace he is humbled, because the more he knows, the more persuaded is he of the vast unexplored depths of wisdom and knowledge that lie beyond him. Earthly good will not satisfy the cravings of the immortal soul. The German poet Goethe thus wrote at the close of his life: "They have called me the child of fortune; nor have I any reason to complain of the events of my life: yet it has been nothing but labour and sorrow; and in seventy-five years I have not had four weeks of true comfort." And if we take another illustration from one of our own most gifted poets, Lord Byron, we shall hear his experience testifying to the same melancholy fact:

"Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,
Count o'er thy days from anguish free;
And know, whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be.

No; for myself so dark my fate,
Through every turn of life hath been—
Man and the world so much I hate—
I care not when I quit the scene."

In the case of the one, we have the experience of the *optimist*, who looks upon all human existence as sunshine, who "snatches joyfully the gifts of the passing hour, and leaves the sterner side of life unnoticed"; and in that of the other we hear the deep groan of the *pessimist*, who sees everything around him dismal and dark—only death in life—in history no progress, but everything tending to barbarism, and in the sum total of human existence the evil constantly triumphing over the good. And why is this? Because neither the one nor the other has sought "the gold tried in the fire" from Him who counsels Laodicea and every other Church to come to Him. If resting on ourselves, we

have only a frail support. We may try wealth, talents, health, possessions, friends—and we shall have to say in the end, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" These supports will not stand the strain which they have to bear. They are not ours more than the dress we wear. We want something which we can really call our own, something that will last when all that is outward fails; and what is this? A firm faith on Jesus as the Gift of God to a sinful world. He who has Him has "unsearchable riches"; he has the riches of pardon, of sonship, of sanctification and complete redemption. And without Him he has nothing, though he were seated, like Alexander, on the throne of the world.

Even from a temporal point of view, the life of the Christian is brighter, better, and happier than that of the unbeliever. He exercises virtue, which is its own reward. He avoids the excesses, the follies, the evils which, woven into the web of life, frequently make it hard to be borne, and at times cause the maddened brain to exclaim, "Is life worth living?" So that if the Cross of Christ had never possessed the effect of neutralizing the sources of man's misery and purifying the fountains of his joy, and if Christ had never been more than the humble Nazarene, whose holy life and self-sacrificing death, were examples for our imitation—then even on this ground, the Christian should have had the victory. But when we come to know the plague of our own hearts, when we feel we are sinners and guilty before God, when conscience accuses and our own hearts condemn us, is it not assuring to know that God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things, and that Christ, who knew no sin, has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him?

This gold which Christ counsels Laodicea to buy is gold that has been tried in the fire, refined by fire, fresh from the furnace, and which, being purified, still retains its bright and beautiful gloss. Now the unsearchable riches of Christ are

"tried" riches. They are always available when needed, they are subject to no change, and they never fail to satisfy their possessor. Thousands have tried them, and they have never been disappointed. From the righteous Stephen, the first Christian martyr, all through the centuries, the gold of a pure and steadfast faith has been thoroughly put to the test; and whether "tried" in the dungeon, or at the stake, it has always come forth bright and burnished.

At the very time when the Message to Laodicea was written by the disciple whom Jesus loved, that disciple was undergoing a trial of faith in a desert isle; yet the veil of heaven was rent, and he saw a vision of glory, such as no human eye had ever seen before: and the trial of his faith has issued in the record of that Revelation, which has cheered the eye and gladdened the heart of a multitude that no man can number, through their pilgrimage of sorrow and suffering to the home of the blessed.

καὶ ἱμάτια λευκά, ἵνα περιβάλῃ, κ.τ.λ., *and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself.* Together with "gold tried in the fire," Christ counsels them to buy white garments, that they may be clothed. This implies their utter misery and wretchedness; and the clothing corresponds to the beauty, and honour, and dignity, which were to be bestowed by Him. The wools of Laodicea were noted for their fleecy whiteness; but there is an offer here of raiment far more white, and which may be taken to represent the righteousness of Christ imputed so as to procure the sinner's justification before God, and His righteousness imparted, so as to procure his sanctification. Both are needful, and both go together in man's salvation. This is the wedding garment (Matt. xxii. 11–13). This is the "best robe" the father put on the prodigal (Luke xv. 22). This is the fine linen, pure and bright, in which Christ's bride was to array herself for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. xix. 8).

In Jer. xxiii. 6, Christ's name is given as "The Lord our Righteousness;" and in Rom. xiii. 14 we are told to put on Christ; and (Gal. iii. 27), as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Now all these passages show that when we come to Christ, He takes away our "filthy garments," as the angel of the Lord (Zech. iii. 3–5) did to Joshua, the high priest, and clothes us with a change of raiment. It was for this object Christ came into the world,—that He might "cover our sins," and clothe us in the spotless robe of His own righteousness. The law of God required a perfect righteousness, and that law can never change. The soul that sinneth, it shall die, unless a substitute is found to meet the requirements of a broken law, and render satisfaction to Divine justice. Christ has become such a substitute. He has magnified the law and made it honourable. He has died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. His righteous life and meritorious death are put to our account; as Art. XI. states, "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings." Christ our substitute took our "filthy raiment," which had come down to us stained from Paradise lost, and He puts upon each one who will receive it, the robe of His righteousness, and so we are accounted righteous before God. And not only so; but He imparts His righteousness to us also, to form our ruined hearts anew, and make us heirs of heaven. Christ bore no sins of His own, for He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners; He suffered because of our sins, which were laid upon Him. We are saved because of His righteousness which is imputed to us, and which our faith receives. The law has been satisfied; Christ has endured the Cross, despising the shame, for us. We have the joy, and the reward, and the glory, of His great humiliation. There are many who profess Christ, but it will be of no avail unless

they put on Christ, unless they take hold of His pierced hand, and cling to His wounded side, and in the language of appropriating faith say with the Apostle St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

It is sometimes said by those who should know the Scriptures better, "Christ lived the life of a sage, and died the death of a martyr. In His death there is the most perfect exhibition of self-sacrifice, preaching to us through a mortal the evil of sin, and the majesty of sorrow!" If this were all, what better would Christ be than any of those on the roll of the noble army of Martyrs? Was not self-sacrifice apparent in the highest degree in the martyrdom of St. Polycarp, and the evil of sin and the majesty of sorrow were as fully exhibited in the sufferings of St. Polycarp, or St. Ignatius, as it was possible for a mortal to make them manifest; but who ever thought of becoming converted to God by contemplating such examples of self-sacrifice? If we are merely to be taught to exercise like virtues of patient endurance and heroic fortitude, what better is Christianity than paganism? In heathen lands are not such exercises common? Exclude the idea of Christ as our substitute, our surety, our sin-bearer, and all the types of Old Testament times are an insoluble enigma; but view them as pointing to Him as the sinner's substitute, and the mystery is at once solved.

We hear it also said: If God is looked upon as requiring an atonement, He must be regarded as a rigorous exactor, who requires His wrath appeased by the blood of an innocent sufferer! This is an unfounded assumption and utterly irreconcilable with fact. There was no vindictive wrath on the part of God, for twice the Voice came from Heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and Christ says, He came to do the will of His Father; so that the satisfaction made by Christ was not to appease an angry exactor, but to carry out the righteous principles of eternal

truth. If we trace man's salvation to its source, we must go further back than Calvary. We must trace it through the cycles of time, further back than creation, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy—we must go back to the bosom of the everlasting Father. The love of God dates from eternity, when God had not yet called into existence any creature to be a co-worker with Himself; and the great central truth of the Bible is that God does not love us because Christ died for us, but *Christ died for us because God loved us.*

Vicarious suffering is the law of human life. It is written in the history of the hero who dies far away in the field of battle; it is written in the life of the philanthropist who sacrifices himself that the guilty may not perish in sin; it is written in the life of every martyr who dies to win souls to Christ; it is written in letters of light on the Cross of Calvary, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." It is for us to accept Him as our surety, to put on His righteousness by faith; and, arrayed in this spotless garment, we shall pass through the gate of the grave undismayed, and stand in the presence of God, the judge of all, without fault and in perfect peace.

καὶ κολλούριον ἐγχρίσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, κ. τ. λ., *and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.* This is the third article of merchandise which Christ counsels the Church at Laodicea to buy. It is noticeable that in all the things to be purchased there is some severity and suffering implied. The gold was to be tried in the fire—the garments were to provide freedom from the blush of shame—and the eyesalve was to act keenly on the eyes, so as to remove any film that might interfere with vision. This anointing of the eyes is to be taken in a spiritual sense. The Laodiceans were like the Pharisees to whom we have already referred. They said, "We see." They were not conscious of their own blindness. Christ has come into the world, that they which see not

might see, and that they which see might be made blind. There is no worse condition than wilful blindness, when men shut their eyes to the truth; and in the case of those who reject it, it is more from wilful perversity than from want of evidence that they throw it aside. Conscience is the eye of the soul. It is by this medium that the light of heaven reaches the heart, or is debarred from access to it. So our Lord said in His Sermon on the Mount: "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light, but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matt. vi. 22–24).

He who has no will for the things belonging to his peace shall have no saving knowledge of them. If conscience be enlightened and in active exercise, the light will be apparent throughout the entire body; but if there is an unenlightened evil conscience, there will be an opposite result. The word here used is ἁπλοῦς, simple, and it gives the idea of one singly intent upon heaven, instead of regarding earthly things as the highest good. Man is represented as possessing an inward eye capable of discerning the true end of life; and if that eye be blinded, how much greater is the spiritual darkness than if the outward eyesight were destroyed. Now to apprehend spiritual truth, the eyes of the understanding must be enlightened (Eph. i. 18), for until this is realized, no man can see himself in his true position before God. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but of the Holy Ghost." The removing the obstruction from our spiritual vision is the first thing a sinner needs; so the Psalmist says, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may see wondrous things out of Thy law."

We see ourselves in our natural state, just as a sailor sees objects in his night glass. The image is inverted; we often put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and it is only when, through the Holy Spirit, the blessed Redeemer applies the

eyesalve to the spiritual eye, and convinces us of our sinfulness, that we really see ourselves in the true light in which we ought to be seen. There was a very significant anointing recorded by St. John, in his Gospel, chap. ix., that of the eyes of the man who was born blind, and St. John must have been an eye-witness to it; so that the direction to the Laodiceans to buy the eyesalve to anoint their eyes must have brought up that circumstance to his mind, more especially as that miracle there recorded was a parable and a prophecy of things which were afterwards to be effected in the kingdom which Christ was to establish, and which did not consist in meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

When the light of heaven is admitted to the conscience, it discovers frailties and infirmities which we never dreamt of as having had any place in us before; it shows our spiritual poverty, and makes us know ourselves to be poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked, and causes us to look away from ourselves to Him who hath all fulness, and "of whose fulness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John i. 16). Whatever we may be naturally, whatever gifts or accomplishments we may possess, they will be of no value without Divine teaching; and all education which is merely secular, and which takes no cognisance of man's moral and spiritual faculties, that keeps back the Word of God from the young, however useful it may be to fit man to maintain a position in the world, is worse than useless to solve the questions—What am I? Whence came I? Whither am I tending? What is to be my great and profound future? How shall I be just with God? and what relation shall I sustain to Him through eternity? There must be, to enable us to solve these questions, the application of the Divine eyesalve, which Christ exhorts the Church at Laodicea to buy,—"the anointing" of which St. John speaks

in his Epistle, and which he said they, to whom it was addressed, had received: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things"; and the Divine teaching the Prophet promises—"All thy children shall be taught of God, and great shall be the peace of thy children."

What a fearful proof of how far man has gone from God is the need there was of an atonement; and this alienation is even more apparent when we reflect that it requires God Himself to convince us of the absolute necessity there is for us personally to become sharers in the benefits of that redemption. And how is this? It is not that the intellect is at fault, or that there is not sufficient evidence of the fact that Christ was the true Messiah; but the stubborn will resists and overpowers the understanding; so that now the words of our Lord are as truly applicable to the world as they were in the days of His flesh—"Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life." If there is a desire for the truth on the part of people, they are sure to find it; but if they are not really in earnest about it—if their inquiries are for the sake of cavil or disputation, while there is no heartfelt love for its principles—it is hard to expect that it will be profitable, because it is not mixed with faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

The Jews, in our Lord's day, were fully aware of the Old Testament prophecies; they saw the wonderful works of Christ, they heard the words of Him who spake as never did man, and yet they remained blind to their best interests. It was not their intellectual powers that were unenlightened, but they did not like a teacher whose doctrines were, as they considered, an innovation upon all that had been taught in the synagogue—who made them dissatisfied with their own tenets, and showed them that whatever the letter of the law might be, they had entirely mistaken its spirit, and misunderstood its force. They could not understand a righteous-

ness which was not of the law, but through the faith of Christ; and unless the eyes of their understandings received Divine illumination, their asserting that they saw, only rendered their case the more hopeless. When the Holy Spirit opens the eyes, it is like the effect of a lamp carried into some deep cavern, pointing to danger on the one side, and grandeur and beauty on the other. But for that holy influence, we never should see or know ourselves, nor should we be otherwise than the Church at Laodicea, which felt no spiritual need. The grace which makes us what we ought to be is not in ourselves, nor of ourselves. The law of God we could not fulfil, and therefore it never could be a law of life to us. We need help from above—that we have only from Christ. We cling naturally to the earth, and it would be as reasonable to expect water to rise above its level without the application of force, as to raise ourselves by any efforts of our own. But as St. Augustine has well said: "He who has made us without ourselves, He who remade us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves." He will not save us against our wills, or in spite of ourselves. We must lay hold of His perfect righteousness, and be not faithless but believing.

Christ has not come as a resistless influence acting upon us, as if we were mere machines. We are always dealt with as moral and responsible beings; and just as our wills are prepared to welcome Christ, in the same proportion shall we be benefited. While He is the Foundation Stone of His Church, and Headstone of the Corner, He is also a Stone of stumbling and Rock of offence to both Houses of Israel, as Isaiah had foretold. He is such to others also; and when privileges are misused, which were designed to lead to God —when the foolish heart is darkened, and the will, under the influence of the old fallen nature, is turning away the soul from God—what can be expected but a quenching of the Spirit, and the sorrow of the world which worketh death. To

Laodicea the counsel was needed, and it is not less so to the Churches still, whose members have eyes but they will not see; as if the means of grace were not intended for them, or as if it were immaterial whether they accepted them or not. Should not our prayer ever be, "Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death"? (Ps. xiii. 3). "O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles" (Ps. xliii. 3).

Ver. 19. Ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ, ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. *As many as I dearly love, I reprove and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent.* The word, ἐλέγχω, which is here joined to παιδεύω is to be taken as conveying more than a simple rebuke. Ebrard says that "judicial inflictions are not here threatened to the Laodiceans, the fear of which might urge them to repentance, but that the past rebukes and threatenings are, as it were, affectingly *apologised* for as having proceeded from love." Surely there was more than this in the stern threatening directed against the Church in Laodicea; and Laodicea was not to be brought to a sense of its true state before God by mere words. ἐλέγχω shows that mere reproof was not all that our Lord intended, but such reproof as would bring conviction, and lead the lukewarm professors of Laodicea to acknowledge their sin, and be brought back, if need be, by sharp discipline to repentance. The same word is used in John xvi. 8, as describing the office of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. "He shall reprove (so as to convict) the world of sin." So also the word, παιδεύω, means not only to instruct, but to instruct by means of correction. The Psalmist David, by the pointed parable addressed to him by Nathan, was led to acknowledge his sin. Here was the rebuke that brought conviction; but the death of the child was the correction which accompanied it; and both were designed to bring

him back to repentance and restoration to the favour of God.

Do not suppose, Christ says to the Church at Laodicea, I am not your friend because I speak sharply to you: "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools"—I rebuke you for your welfare, to make you feel the danger of your position, and the chastisement I am about to inflict, however severe it may seem to you, will be for your spiritual profit, and growth in grace. This is still the object of chastisement; and although some consider human suffering as punishment for sin, it is often quite the reverse. There are those who have said, as the Jews did in the time of our Lord, of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, that they were greater sinners than others because they suffered such things; and some are still ready to justify the inference that the eighteen upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell were sinners above all that dwelt at Jerusalem. Job, the perfect man of Uz, was considered by his friends to have been a very heinous transgressor, because of the misfortunes and calamities that befell him. But this was not so, as he himself oftentimes urged against his censors, and the latter end of his life justified his own conviction, as well as the ways of God to men. This St. James also confirms, when he says: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (Jas. v. 11); and in the same connexion he says: "We count them happy that endure."

In St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" And just immediately before St. Paul's death, in the last Epistle he wrote, when he was a

prisoner at Rome, suffering for the testimony he had borne to the truth, and while speaking of all his persecutions and afflictions, he adds: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"; as if the absence of suffering implied a want of sonship. In these passages we see that pain and suffering are not penal, but purifying; not damnatory, but disciplinary; forming part of the παιδεία which follows, in most cases, the ἔλεγχος. To be always living in the sunshine of prosperity, spreading our branches like the green bay tree, is not necessarily a token of God's approval. Better far to be able to say when undergoing the salutary discipline by which God is fitting us more fully for the enjoyment of heaven: Thy right hand shall hold me up, and Thy loving correction shall make me great (Ps. xviii. 35). Suffering then may be a friend in disguise; do not therefore faint when thou art rebuked of the Lord. Those swelling waves and stormy winds are destined the more speedily to waft you over the troubled sea of life. Look to the Cross of Jesus, and see there the Prince of Life, the Prince of sufferers —and yet perfectly sinless; and know that if you suffer with Him, you shall also reign with Him. Look upon all as the result of Divine arrangement, and extract from it that healing medicine, which will restore your souls to manly vigour, and make you the better qualified to press onward in the path that leads to heaven.

Away with the Manichean heresy which would ascribe all pain to the Evil principle opposing God's will, as if there were two supreme wills in antagonism. Away with the Stoical hypothesis that there is no difference between pain and pleasure except what we choose to make ourselves—all evil being only unripe good. And away with the Epicurean notion that God does not attend to the minute concerns of men so as to inflict chastisement upon them. One reason why dark Providences have so little effect upon us is that

they are not looked upon as part of God's plan, but they are thought to be the result of chance; whereas the history of the Church, from the time of righteous Abel to the present, is a commentary on the words, "As many as I love dearly, I reprove and chasten." It is only when viewed in the light of the Cross that the mystery of pain is really explicable; it is there transfigured. It is there seen to be the balm of life, the branch to destroy the bitterness of every Marah which the world may disclose, and purify every fountain of man's joy.

When chastening comes from the hand of God, there is always a "need be," and it should ever be our prayer that it may be sanctified. There is in nature a beautiful equilibrium preserved; but if it was never disturbed, if there were not occasionally the earthquake, the thunder, and the storm, the atmosphere would be charged with pestilence, and destruction to man and beast would follow. In God's spiritual kingdom there is also a balance kept up; hence we read: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Cor. i. 5). There is a wise design further to teach us patience and reliance upon Him. When our Lord was made acquainted with the fact that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days in the place where he was. He does not exempt His people from trials, but He gives them strength to meet them. We sometimes entertain hard thoughts of God, and say, "God cannot care for me when He permits such heavy trials to fall upon me." Gideon so reasoned: "If the Lord be with me why has all this befallen me?" "Hath God forgotten to be gracious," says David; "is His mercy clean gone for ever," and am I left here no better than a wreck upon a lonely shore? Look upward and see; and from the Man at God's right hand the assuring answer will come: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee. The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed,

but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed."

We often say in regard to this life and the present world: "This is my rest; here will I dwell." God embitters the world's pleasures, and dims the lustre of its joys. We stoop to pick up the golden apples which are thrown on our path, and are hindered in running our heavenly race. The joys of life are like the incoming wave which breaks upon the shore, but the sorrows of life carry us outward to the eternal ocean, and to the unfathomed depths of Godhead. We are borne thus nearer to Christ, and the objects of time become dim and worthless by reason of the glory that excelleth. And will not the glory of heaven be all the more welcome after the rough voyage which we have had in reaching it? To heighten the lighter shades in a picture, there is always a dark background. Who best enjoys the sweets of home, but the traveller who has crossed the burning sands, and been exposed to dangers innumerable both in flood and field? Who but the mariner who has weathered many a storm can best realize the calm and comfort of a haven? So with the child of affliction: are not these fierce winds and dark tempests the harbingers of the rest and peace of heaven? We should therefore welcome the darkness as well as the light, the sorrow as well as the joy, if brought nearer Him who is the Captain of our Salvation, who holds the helm and guides the ship.

What led St. Paul to wish to be a sharer in the sorrows of his Lord? He desired that he might know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death (Phil. iii. 10). What was this but desiring to be holy like Christ, and wishing to have Christ's nature; therefore he wished for fellowship in Christ's sufferings. He desired to be raised in the scale of being, and he knew he could not have the Lord's

holiness without His sorrows. The springs of love in Christ Jesus shall never dry up. Of His kingdom there shall be no end. He is always the same, and whatever our feelings may dictate, if we have only faith to penetrate the clouds and darkness that are round about Him, we shall find that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat. Jacob said once in despair: "All these things are against me," but he ignorantly misinterpreted Providence. We see but the outward course of events, but we know nothing of God's designs, and we therefore misjudge. We see but the scattered patches of heaven's sunshine, we read the broken and fragmental paragraphs of God's seven-sealed book. Only when we have reached the goal, when the morning of eternity dawns, and these earthly shadows flee away, shall we know the depth of those "mysteries of grace," those "ways that we cannot tell;" and the calm, the rest, the joy of heaven will be all the sweeter for the roughness of the way.

ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον, be zealous therefore, and repent. The zeal is first required, then the saving change by which they were to be renewed and re-established in their love to Christ. One would suppose repentance would have first been enjoined, and then fresh zeal in the cause of truth; but it is otherwise, and the reason is because the want of zeal was that which had exposed the Laodicean Church to such severe censure. There was no warmth, no fervour, no earnestness, and the first step which they should take was to strengthen the things that were ready to die—to stir up the dying embers of a religious profession, and awake from their sleep of lukewarm indifference, and arise from the dead and Christ should give them light. "It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing," and probably there had been considerable warmth of feeling shown in the early days of that Church; but now how cold it had grown! Let but the spring-time again return, now that the blighting influences of

winter had left their sad traces behind, and with a fresh bound they should regain that happy state in which they found it a joy to go to the solemn assemblies with them that kept holy day, like the Psalmist, who exclaimed, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord," or as in another Psalm, when in ecstasy he cried out, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (cxxii. 1; xlii. 2).

Zeal in the service of God is a Christian duty; for if this be wanting, the graces of faith and love will soon languish, and when these dry up there is no source from which obedience can be maintained. If we take the example of Christ, we find Him at every turn of His active, earnest, holy life, burning with zeal for the glory of God, until the disciples could truthfully say, as they observed His unremitting assiduity in maintaining the sanctity of His Father's House, that the words of Psalm lxix. 9, had their literal accomplishment in Him: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up" (John ii. 17). He was alike desirous of preserving the holiness of God's house and the holiness of those who came to worship there; and as the *Speaker's Commentary* has the passage, it is still more forcible: "The zeal of Thine house will eat (devour) me,"; the words bearing unequivocal proof to the untiring energy, the unflagging constancy with which He laboured for the honour of God and for the benefit of the race He came to save; thus verifying His own statement, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

People never attain to any eminence, even in temporal things, by half-heartednesss. It requires the full energy of mental and bodily powers to reach success in any worldly enterprise; and yet when men have expended all their efforts to gain the object upon which their enthusiasm has been fixed, they find it only a phantom after all. Should the

children of this world in their active energy, and wise, far-seeing plans to secure the object of their ambition, be wiser than the children of light? It is not reasonable to entertain such a thought, and yet from practical experience it is shown to be true. In our religious profession we are apt to be satisfied with reaching a certain point and stopping there, as if Christian life was not one of progress, constant progress, onward, upward, heavenward. "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect," says the Apostle, "but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 13, 14). Our blessed Lord did not encourage an easy self-satisfied spirit amongst His disciples when He was on earth, but quite the reverse. He spoke of the kingdom of heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force, *βιασταὶ ἁρπάζουσιν αὐτὴν*, which clearly indicates that only those who *strive* can enter. Since the days of the Baptist, there has been an eager irresistible striving after the kingdom of the Messiah, which is as though it were being taken by storm. That calm expectant state was then at an end, and there were energy and effort being put forth, so that those who were looking for it were struggling hard for its possession. What does this show but the zeal of the early followers of our Lord, in order to their obtaining a share in the spiritual kingdom which He was erecting in the hearts of men? It is so still. There must be the same zealous affection manifested, whatever the world may say to the contrary. How strange it is that the energy the world approves in securing success in worldly pursuits, it condemns and ridicules in matters of religion.

A man who is zealous in a worldly point of view is to be commended; a Christian who would show his earnestness in regard to the pressing subject of the destiny of the soul is

to be condemned! No moderation in anything but religion; and what is this but to encourage the dreamy lukewarmness of the Church of Laodicea. Surely our zeal, in proportion to the importance of the enterprise in which we engage, should be measured; and as the concerns of immortality are more valuable than the things of time, which perish in the using, so much the more should our zeal be ardent. It is possible, however, to be zealous, and that in the cause of God, and yet derive no benefit. Jehu was zealous; for he said, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord;" but his motive was self-interest. So St. Paul speaks of his countrymen as "having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge," such as he himself had before his conversion. Men may err, and often have erred, in religious zeal, when ignorant of the truth. What but this ignorance of God's word, coupled with intense zeal on the part of persecutors, has, in times past, lighted the fires to consume the martyred saints of God, and been erecting a Golgotha in every age.

True zeal, which Christ enjoined in the case of the Laodiceans, was the new life of Christianity in the soul; an earnest active effort to rouse themselves from spiritual stupor, and be constrained by the love of Christ to live to Him who gave Himself for them. This holy fire of Divine love the long-suffering Saviour desired to see rekindled in their hearts, as, otherwise, there could be no hope for the Church, which was now reduced to the lowest degree of feebleness, and the lamp of which should soon be quenched in darkness, and the candlestick removed out of its place.

But the exhortation also adds, *καὶ μετανόησον, and repent.* The repentance was, in this instance, to follow the zeal, because the charge against this Church was lukewarm indifference. Their first object was to shake off dull sloth, to stir themselves from their drowsy condition, to make a stand on the Lord's side, and then the Holy Spirit would "renew

them again unto repentance." The same call was addressed to the Church at Ephesus: "Repent, and do the first works." (See on Rev. ii. 5.)

What is repentance? It is a transformation of the moral disposition, a change of heart, a turning from sin unto holiness. Under the law, repentance was enjoined, but the change had respect to the moral requirements of the law; but under the gospel, while repentance is equally required—for no one can hope for salvation while there is no heartfelt sorrow for sin, and no purpose of amendment of life—faith in Jesus Christ is inseparably connected with repentance, so that there can be no true repentance without it. A question has been frequently asked as to whether faith or repentance comes first in the order of a sinner's salvation. There is a repentance that comes before faith, and there is a deeper repentance which follows faith, and which is the effect of saving faith. There must be a sense of guilt, and need of forgiveness, experienced before we flee to Christ for salvation. Like the prodigal, when he spent all his substance and began to be in want, he at length came to himself. This was the turning-point in his history. Then he thought of his father's house, where there was enough and to spare. Then he became humbled, and was sorry for what he had done, and confessed how sinful and unworthy he was, and resolved to retrace his footsteps to his father's house, and pour out his humble and contrite appeal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Repentance is illustrated in that beautiful and most elaborate of all the parables of our Divine Lord. It is illustrated in the woman who was a sinner, standing in the house of Simon the Pharisee, behind the Saviour, weeping, washing His feet with tears and wiping them with the hairs of her head, kissing His feet and anointing them with her precious ointment. And what more perfect picture than the Apostle, after

his base denial of the best of masters and the most faithful of friends, going out and weeping bitterly for the crime which his conscience told him he had been guilty of!

Let no one suppose that repentance is not as necessary under the new law as it was under the old. It was the first doctrine of the Baptist; it was among the first recorded of our Lord's teachings (Mark i. 15). It was inculcated from time to time during His public ministry: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It was taught in His parables and embodied in some of His most powerful exhortations; and when about to leave the world, it was the last charge He gave His Apostles: "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv. 47). And now, when He visits the Seer of Patmos in his lonely exile, and directs him to convey the several messages to the Churches, first and last He calls them to repentance. But, it may be said, when we have come to believe in and receive Christ, when we have undergone the great transition to newness or amendment of life, we do not need repentance; for then we are assured of salvation—we have then reached a perfect state, and from that condition we cannot possibly fall!

Surely those who speak thus have never known the plague of their own hearts. Surely they have never considered from Whose lips the Divine direction came, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark i. 15). Nor can they have realized the length and breadth of that love which passeth knowledge, which was no less apparent in warning of coming danger, than in establishing the Saviour's followers in the hopes of the gospel. Where are they, who while under the burden of the flesh, have reached a condition of perfection, or where are they to whom the words of St. James do not truly apply: "In many things we offend all"? Had St. John, the beloved disciple, not passed to newness of life, and was he not living in

communion with his Lord, when he wrote, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"? Is there any positive guarantee given, whereby the Christian is insured against all liability to fall from grace given? or is the place of forgiveness to be denied to such as truly repent? Certainly not. (See Article XVI.)

Our Christian life is still one of probation, and while, on God's part, there is nothing that can separate us from Him, on our own part there is constant need of watching, praying, and guarding against those weaknesses to which the new life is liable to succumb. It is needful not to touch "the unclean thing," to shun the sin-polluted atmosphere, if we would go on with firm step and constant perseverance to heaven. Let it not be supposed that, without repentance—no more than holiness—any one can see the Lord. Meetness for heaven is as much dependent upon repentance, as it is upon the grace of the Holy Spirit in sanctification; for it is as necessary first to forsake sin and begin a new life, as it is to die daily unto sin and live unto righteousness. Tell us not that they preach the gospel who leave out repentance. It may be the gospel of man, but it is not that of God. It is barren Antinomianism, which would teach that Christ will save the sinner in unrepented sin, instead of from sin and its effects.

The Laodicean Church had fallen grievously, but instead of the dread sentence conveying the punishment which was so richly deserved, we see mercy rejoicing against judgment. The day of grace had not yet closed, as it had in the case of Jerusalem, when the things belonging to its peace, which had been neglected, were then hid from the eyes of its people. By repentance this last of the seven Churches might still reach the place of safety. Yet a little while, and the call which was now given, if refused, should cease; and the next verse shows the pressing urgency with which Christ, in His unwearied search, is constraining souls to comply with

the invitations of love and mercy, and of which, through a timely repentance, they may be still sharers.

Vers. 20. Ἰδοὺ, ἕστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου, καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, καὶ εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν, καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ. *Behold, I stand at the door, and am knocking; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.* No verse in the New Testament shows more fully and forcibly the patience, condescension, and deep yearning love of Christ for man, than this. From the cross we see Him dying for us; but after He has endured the cross, and has gone away from the ungrateful world He came to save, He is no idle spectator of the wants and woes of humanity, but still cherishes the same deep compassion for sinners as when He wept over Jerusalem. From the lukewarm condition of the Church of Laodicea, we might have expected its utter extinction—that having grieved and resisted the strivings of the Holy Spirit, Christ would have finally and for ever withdrawn His mercy; but, on the contrary, even at the eleventh hour of the day, there is a call to labour for Him. The rebuke he gave to Laodicea was not that of a stern unrelenting judge, but of one who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who chastened that Church, as He does every Church still, for its profit, that it might be a partaker in His holiness (Heb. xii. 10).

How varied are the gracious invitations in Holy Scripture, and under how many beautiful images are they presented to us. Here Christ is represented not only as waiting for the conversion of sinners, but knocking for an entrance into the sinner's heart. The figure of a door is one that He applies to Himself. John x. 9: "I am the door; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and go in and out, and find pasture." Now if Christ is the door of heaven, surely we

ought to be found waiting there, watching, knocking, and earnestly seeking admission through Him; but such is human nature that it wanders away further and further from God, like some orb in space that has gone beyond the controlling power of its central sun, and while rushing to its own destruction, is a source of danger and dread to others. The relationship between Christ and the sinner is here reversed. Instead of our seeking Him, He is represented as seeking us, just as He is portrayed in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. He had encouraged us to knock, and given the assurance that it should be opened to us; but seeing we go so slowly to avail ourselves of the blessed privilege, He condescends to our weakness, and changes places with us. He is represented as standing at our door and knocking, that we may open.

The imagery of this verse is taken, we may believe, from the Song of Solomon, although some have conjectured that there is no connexion between that book, and the times of our Lord, and that no allusion to it is made in the New Testament. Surely this very passage has its counterpart in Canticles v. 2–6. If we regard the Song of Solomon as an allegory, setting forth the spiritual relation between Christ and His Church, the very condition of the Bride in that book is exactly that of the Church at Laodicea; for it is during her hours of inattention and heedlessness, the Bridegroom takes His departure, and "the voice of the Beloved that was knocking" was for the time silenced. It has been thought by some that the figure is rather that of a guest at night coming to the house of his friend for comfort, and cheer, and guidance, and who cries at the door for admission, so that his friend within may know who it is that has come. Ewald considers the allusion here to St. Peter's standing, and knocking at the door of Mary's house, after having been released from prison. This is extremely far-fetched, and

we can hardly think such a circumstance as this would have suggested the call addressed to the Church at Laodicea. The figure is suggestive of spiritual blessing, and there is no good reason for departing from the view entertained by the early Church, that Canticles v. 2–6, is here alluded to. Who is it that stands knocking at the door of the sinner's heart? It is the glorified Lord, the Alpha and the Omega, He who liveth and was dead, and hath the keys of death and Hades. He stands, waiting, calling, knocking, seeking an entrance. He does so still, by the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, by mercies, trials, temptations, reverses, by the voice of conscience. "Unto you, O men, I call, and My voice is to the sons of man."

But the picture we have here suggests to us that men's hearts are shut against the blessed Saviour. How can this be? Can men be so devoid of feeling, so blind to their eternal interests, as to refuse admission to Him who thus stretches out His hand, as He did to St. Peter, to save us from death? It is difficult to understand why it is so, but we know it as a fact that, although Christ, the Lord of Glory, calls, men refuse, and turn aside, "one to his farm, another to his merchandise." The sinner's heart is bolted and barred; and whether the house be empty or furnished with guests, there is no room for Christ more than there was for His virgin Mother in the inn at Bethlehem.

There are many opposing forces—prejudice, love of the world, ambition, pride, vanity, pleasure, and unbelief—all these keep Christ away, and leave no room for Him. He could open the heart if He chose. He could break open the door, and force an entrance; but He does not except by the use of means. He is here represented as a suppliant seeking admission. He does not enter any man's heart against his will. He does not save any man against his will. Man's will is left free to refuse, or to accept; so that

we are treated always, not as machines, but as accountable beings. We may regard the bolt as on the inside, and Christ calls upon us to withdraw it. But perhaps it will be said, "We have no power." Yes, we have power to use means, we have power to resist evil habits, we have power to avoid evil influences. There are many things placed in our own power, and we are accountable for the use we make of them. Christ's voice is heard in creation. The heavens above and the earth beneath, with all their beautiful order and adaptation and design, tell of the wisdom and goodness of their Almighty Architect. But in redemption every step reveals the footfall of the Redeemer, and every voice carries with it a proclamation of grace and mercy for sinners: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Conscience too, that inner monitor, which reproves when we do wrong, and approves when we do right—what is this, but the voice of Christ knocking at the door?

By Christ "knocking," we may understand the free external offer of God's grace; but the opening of the door requires more than the effort of the natural will. The Pelagian heresy finds no place in Scripture. As well expect water to rise above its level without force applied, the Ethiopian to change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as to save ourselves without the predisposing grace of God. The gift of a spiritual appetite must come from above, and when provided with this spiritual gift—God's gracious favour—it is upon the use we make of it that our spiritual destiny mainly turns. And there is no one in Christ's Church who has not had, at one time or another in his life, Christ knocking at the door of his heart, seeking admission; but poor earthborn mortals that we are, engrossed with the things around us, and heedless of our better portion, we too frequently shut our ear, like

the deaf adder, or like one of old, procrastinate and say: "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." Truly it may be said, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider."

καὶ εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν, κ.τ.λ., *I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me.* This is the promise given to him who not only hears Christ's voice, but opens the door. He draws His people with the cords of a man, and with bands of love (Hosea xi. 4); not by means which are harsh or cruel, but by humane influences, by reason and judgment, and by paternal affection. He opens the heart by gentleness, kindness, and constraining love; yet when the unclean spirit has got powerfully entrenched in it, there are stronger measures sometimes brought to bear. "Knowing therefore, the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men." When the voice of Christ is disregarded, and when the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, He comes and strips it of its armour wherein it trusted, by some of those providential dispensations which are in His hands; and when we refuse to listen to His voice, He makes us listen to His chastisements. "If any man hear My voice." The hearing ear is the first thing, before the heart is made to understand. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. It matters not who they are. The passage says "Any man:" barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, learned and unlearned, Jew and Greek, the call is addressed to all. This was the last warning cry to Laodicea—the most urgent and direct appeal. Apostles had toiled in sowing the good seed in Laodicea—they had watered it with their tears; they had laboured in vain to rouse the lukewarm and lethargic people; and now He who has the keys of death and Hades, who shutteth and no man openeth, who openeth and no man shutteth, comes, and puts forth one further effort to obtain an

entrance into the heart. The voice was not the roll of the earthquake or the thunder, but the still small voice—the voice of love and mercy.

He had sent messenger after messenger, like the proprietor of the vineyard to receive the fruits, but hitherto the Laodiceans had been, like barren fig trees, producing no fruit. Now He comes Himself. There is no gulf so broad that the wings of love will not span it. If at last they will hear His voice, He will come in to them and sup with them and they with Him. He calls upon them to open their hearts, and He stimulates them to exertion by the promise here held out. But is it not said regarding the heart of Lydia, that "the Lord opened her heart?" This does not mean that the first impulse in every case, the *motus inevitabilis* of grace does not come from Him, for that "gracious favour" with which the sinner is "prevented" comes always to the sinner from God; but Lydia's conversion, her baptism, and the faith of her household, came all so quickly in succession, that the Evangelist notices the Divine impulse in a special manner. The spiritual appetite and desire were imparted, and there was a ready acquiescence—no resistance to the grace which was offered, but, "with willing submission, she rendered the moral self-conscious compliance by which she arrived at faith."[1] Now what is the promise? "I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me."

Eating and drinking together was a symbol of reconciliation. The promise then is one which speaks of friendship and communion. Holy Communion is called the Supper of the Lord. It is an emblem of Christ and His people dwelling together in unity and at peace, and is a bond of perpetual friendship. It brings the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ prominently to view; in it we are one with Christ and Christ with us; it is the strengthening and refreshing of

[1] Meyer, *Handbook on Acts*, xvi. 14. Luthard, *On Free Will*, p. 427.

our souls for life's journey, just as in the wilderness, Elijah by partaking of that mysterious food, was fitted for his journey to the Mount of God. The blessings bestowed by Christ are frequently brought under our notice by the figure of a supper. Indeed, during the Old Testament dispensation, the same emblem of eating and drinking is frequently used to denote reconciliation. In Exod. xxiv. 10, we are told that the elders on the Mount Sinai saw God and did eat and drink. This sacrificial feast upon the peace offerings was prefigurative of the Divine feast instituted by our Lord for His people, and was a type of that marriage supper of the Lamb, which we shall partake of with our Lord in heaven. When Christ received sinners, He ate with them, and when He left us a memorial of His death till He come, He appointed the Holy Feast of His broken body and of His shed blood, a feast also founded upon a sacrifice—a peace offering to be partaken of by Christians to strengthen them for their journey heavenward, and to give them closer fellowship with their Redeemer, than they could have from any other act of their Holy Faith. By faith they feed upon Him whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed. They are incorporated into Christ, they realize His spiritual presence, His heavenly light illumines their souls, they see Him, the sweetest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, and they have a prelibation of the bliss of heaven.

Supper was the last meal of the day, and there was a special fitness in Christ saying to the Church at Laodicea, that He would sup with them—that in life He would hold communion with them, and at last, when about to depart from the scene of their earthly pilgrimage, He would refresh them by His presence. He would bid the troubled Jordan, through which they had to cross, divide, and bring them safely to the everlasting Canaan, the rest that remaineth for

the people of God. Could there be more comforting assurance than this? That when the night should gather around them, when their eyelids were about to close in death, they would enjoy His presence. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the fires thou shalt not be burned;" but relying on that presence, like the Psalmist, they would be enabled to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. xxiii.).

How different the usages of the Prince of Peace to those of Eastern princes. The latter always ate apart from their subjects, and there could be no communion, no companionship. What wondrous condescension on the part of Him who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords! If He meant to reach the hearts of His people, He would not keep them at a distance; but He would be among them as one that doth serve. He would weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice. He would sanctify all life. He would consecrate its times of joy, and times of sorrow; and, by His Divine presence, ennoble all He should come into contact with, transfiguring the base into the beautiful, making saints out of sinners, angels out of men, and from the wilderness of this world a new Paradise of God.

The promise of supping with Christ and Christ with us is one which reaches into the eternal future; its fulfilment is not to be measured by any earthly standard. It extends far beyond the boundaries of time. Its full realization will only be manifest when the voice shall come out of the throne, the voice of a great multitude as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Then shall it be said, The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.

The angel voice is next heard directing the Seer of Patmos

to write: "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." The same figure of a supper is still kept in view. The last scene on earth—a supper—Christ supping with those who open their hearts to receive Him; and the first scene of heaven—a supper—the installation banquet of those who have been washed in the blood of Christ, who are arrayed in the bright and perfect robe of Christ's righteousness, and who are made kings and priests unto God. Suffering with Him in His humiliation, they shall then be sharers with Him in His glory. Eating and drinking now at His table, they shall drink with Him the new wine in His Father's kingdom. With these exceeding great and precious promises in view, we should readily yield ourselves as willing subjects to Him; and instead of keeping Him knocking at the door of our hearts for an entrance, we should rather say to the door of our hearts, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, that the King of Glory may come in."

Ver. 21. *Ὁ νικῶν, δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα, καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ Πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. He that overcometh I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne.* With this sublime promise the Epistles to the Seven Churches end, and this is the climax of all that preceded it. It is the highest honour in Christ's gift to bestow—an honour higher than that reserved even for Apostles, for they were to sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel—it is more than the seat of honour which the sons of Zebedee were desirous to obtain for themselves in Christ's kingdom, and which they were looking for as a temporal one. The high dignity is promised to those who are already rebuked for their lukewarmness, if they will only become valiant soldiers of the Cross, if they will resist and strive against the indifference of

the Laodicean professors, and overcome the easily besetting sin of that Church.

This promise reminds us of the language of our Lord's intercession on behalf of His disciples, when He prayed: "Neither pray I for them alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word: that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them, that they may be one even as We are one. Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me." The highest position and honour attainable by an Oriental was considered to be a seat on the right hand of the king; so when Bathsheba, the mother of king Solomon, came to him on behalf of Adonijah, a seat was placed for her on his right hand. The next highest seat was on the left hand of the king; so that the mother of Zebedee's children sought the most distinguished places that could be held by any subject.[1] The words of the promise to Laodicea convey the idea of sharing with Christ in His throne, not occupying separate thrones as were promised to the Twelve, or seats apart on His right and left as were asked by Salome for James and John; for the Greek, as Bishop Wordsworth has observed, is *καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου* (not *ἐπὶ*, upon), and this use of the preposition, *ἐν*, as coupled with *θρόνῳ*, while it occurs twice in this verse is found nowhere else in the New Testament, although *ἐπὶ* is used with other cases of *θρόνῳ* often (Matt. xix. 28; xxv. 31; Rev. iv. 2, 9; v. 1, 7, 13; vi. 16). What then is the force of the two prepositions? *ἐν* gives the idea of admission into and session in the same throne, whereas *ἐπὶ* represents the act of taking a seat upon a separate throne.

[1] Joseph., *Antiq.*, vi. 11, 9.

Now there are two thrones spoken of in the verse; Christ's own throne and His Father's throne. The latter He is now seated upon, and none but Christ could have a place there. That is the seat and centre of essential Godhead and power, and the creature can have no place on that throne of majesty and glory, before which the Angels veil their faces. The honour then which those who overcome have to look forward to, is to share with their glorified Lord His own throne, which is yet to be erected at His Second Coming. Since His ascension to heaven, He sits at the right hand of God, from thenceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool (Phil. ii. 9; Heb. i. 3; xii. 2). He overcame death and him that had the power of death. He had victory over sin and the world, and having triumphed in the conflict with the three great enemies of His people, God hath highly exalted Him. Like Him, each faithful follower, must endure the conflict, for the honour reserved for the faithful in Laodicea is only to be enjoyed by those who "overcome."

What then was the peculiar contest they had to engage in? The difficulties to be met, the dangers to be avoided, and the temptations to be resisted in the several Apocalyptic Churches vary according to the peculiar character of the opposing forces. Here the sins to be overcome were those of lukewarmness, which was so offensive to Christ that He said, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth"—worldly-mindedness and pride, and self-sufficiency and satisfaction. These were the leading evils which the Christian conqueror had to overcome, and in resisting these, he was to be raised to the highest dignity which could be conferred upon any creature. What do the Scriptures reveal to us regarding this throne, on which the faithful shall sit with their once humbled, but then glorified Redeemer?

Jesus Christ is now exalted to the right hand of the Father as the σύνθρονος of God. He is now occupying the regency of the universe, as the reward of His humiliation, and in His mediatorial character He will remain there until all hostile powers shall have been overcome. There He is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession; there He exercises regal power as Mediator to save and defend us. As our Mediator he instructs in His prophetic office, He intercedes in His priestly office, and He rules as our King. But when the end of the present economy has come, the dominion of Christ shall in no wise cease, for He shall continue a King for ever; even when the beatific vision shall have rendered prophetic instruction unnecessary, and when a present enjoyment shall have superseded all intercession, Christ shall continue a king for ever. We read that the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. xi. 15). His kingdom is yet to be established on earth, and to this the whole creation is looking forward in earnest expectation; and we may be assured that the promise contained in the message to the Church of Laodicea is to be fully realized when that grand event shall occur.

Christ's promise is that those who overcome should sit with Him on His own throne. Now this cannot be at present, for Christ has no throne apart from His Father's, and when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power hostile to God, He shall deliver up His mediatorial kingdom to the Father, inasmuch as the Father gave it to Him (John xiii. 3), and He shall be glorified with the glory He had with the Father before the world was. The whole work of Mediator shall then have been completed, and as there shall be then no militant Church on earth to govern, the regency shall cease; but the kingdom shall last for ever, Christ Himself becoming subject to the Father, that

God may be all in all. Upon the throne on which Christ now sits with the Father, neither Angel nor Archangel could have a place, because it is the throne of Divine majesty, which no created being could share; and to be installed in it is to have a royalty which is absolutely supreme and incommunicable; and while the exaltation of Christ to this the highest seat of honour in the universe, was His rightful prerogative, in virtue of His humiliation and suffering, it also unequivocally proves the Divine character of the Son of God. But the promise to sit with Christ on His own throne is quite distinct from any spiritual enjoyment of Christ now, or any transcendent privileges to be attained after the general judgment, for Christ is now, and will then be, reigning conjointly with God the Father upon the eternal throne which the Three Divine Persons, in One God, hold in common, and shall hold for ever and ever.

Christ's own throne is that which, at His Second Advent, He shall set up over the whole earth, and in this throne, those who have "overcome" shall undoubtedly share. It is to the Second Advent the Church of God has in every age been looking in high expectancy, and longing for its realization; and her earnest desires may be faithfully expressed in the words of one of the sweetest of the sons of song:

> "Come then, and added to Thy many crowns,
> Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth,
> For Thou alone art worthy. It was Thine
> By ancient heritage ere nature's birth;
> And Thou hast made it Thine by purchase since,
> And overpaid its value with Thy blood."

The sitting with Christ on His Throne will be at His glorious appearing, when His transfigured Church shall with Him reign over, and judge the nations in the flesh—when Satan shall be bound, and when he shall have no longer power to deceive the nations. In the person of Antichrist

there shall be one final struggle made to overthrow Christ's kingdom; but as every similar effort has been foiled from the beginning, so will it be then. At Christ's coming they who have, during the past, been faithful to Him, who have suffered in His cause, and who have witnessed against the opposing world power, shall rise from the dead, and reign with Him. This is called the *First Resurrection*, and on such as are partakers of it, the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. This is the millennial period which has been marked out by the earliest and latest prophecies—Enoch's, as recorded by St. Jude, and that of St. John the Divine, closing up the volume of inspiration with the "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Thus while one end of this rainbow-like promise rests on Paradise lost, the other stretches on to Paradise restored. Was not the first resurrection what St. Paul ardently desired? not merely to be raised from the dead, *εἴ πως καταντήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν*, if so be I may attain the resurrection which is from the dead. Not that he had any misgivings as to attaining to the resurrection; not that he felt it likely he should remain alive until the Parousia, or personal appearing, of Christ; but he desired, if possible, to be a sharer in the first resurrection, the *ἀνάστασις τῶν δικαίων*. Lightfoot says, the resurrection *from* the dead is the final resurrection of the righteous to a new and glorified life. This meaning, which the context requires, is implied by the form of expression. The general resurrection of the dead, whether good or bad, is *ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν*; on the other hand, the resurrection of Christ, and of those who rise with Christ, is generally *ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ ἐκ νεκρῶν* (Luke xx. 35; Acts iv. 2; 1 Pet. i. 3).

To the Apostles the promise was given that "they should eat and drink at His table, and sit on thrones judging the

twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke xxii. 30); and in 1 Cor. vi. 2, the Apostle of the Gentiles asks the Church: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" and in ver. 3, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" This would imply that the saints are to be *πάρεδροι*, or assessors in the great judicial transactions which are to wind up the *ὁ αἰὼν μέλλων* in contradistinction to the *ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος*. This refers to the close of the period when Christ shall have erected His throne upon the wreck of all human empires, and during which He with His saints in transfigured bodies will reign over men in the flesh. The saints of God shall condemn the world, because they have manifested holiness in life and patiently suffered for Christ, while the world has been guilty of base ingratitude. Evil angels shall be condemned by the saints of God, showing how they, weak and fallible men, remained firm and faithful in their allegiance to God, while beings of higher nature, who enjoyed God's presence, fell sadly from their more exalted station.

But the expression "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" refers to some judicial functions the saints will, with the glorified Lord, be called upon to discharge. We do not know whether this may mean that saints shall have rule over other orders of being. This may be so; for man's dignity, in virtue of Christ's death, is second only to that of Christ Himself. There is no nature that is brought into such intimate union with the Divine as man's nature. It may be that, in the millennial time, God shall carry on His government through the instrumentality of His saints, just as He is now doing through the instrumentality of angels, who are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who are heirs of salvation; and if the transfigured Church is to sit in assize on evil angels, we may also conceive its possessing authority and being invested with dignity over

the good. Whatever honour shall be conferred at Christ's Second Advent on those who have witnessed and suffered for Him in times of trial, when the love of the world, or the bare boon of life, led many to draw back and apostatize, the faithful in Laodicea should enjoy. But as Christ overcame, they would also overcome; and the victory that overcometh the world, St. John tells us, is our faith.

To witness for Christ in the face of an opposing world, and in opposition to all the wiles and temptations of the prince of darkness, is not an easy task; but by the grace and power of Christ, it has been done, and can be done. It is not enough to believe with the heart unto righteousness; it is also necessary with the mouth to make confession unto salvation. It is not so difficult to "overcome" in our day as it was in the days that are past, when the dungeon, or exile, or stake, was the terrible alternative which the early Christians had to prepare for, if found bearing open testimony to their Divine Redeemer; and we know that hundreds did not even dread the fiery ordeal, but welcomed it rather than do dishonour to Him who gave Himself as a sacrifice for them. The witness which they bore, the noble confession they made, the death agonies they endured, are all recorded to rebuke our feeble half-hearted Christianity; and the blood of the Martyrs has been the seed of the Church. "If we suffer with Christ," says the Apostle, "we shall also reign with Him." If we have here entered into fellowship with Christ in His sufferings, we shall have a future participation in Christ's glorified life, and especially in that reign which will commence at His appearing.

As the Church began at Christ's ascension, the visible kingdom of Christ will begin at His Second Advent. The glorious kingdom of the Messiah which is yet to be established is as certain an event as His First Coming to our world in great humility, and should be desired, expected, longed for, by

every Christian heart. It formed an Article in every ancient Creed, and animated and comforted the Christian Church in every age. It should have the same blessed effect still; for we see what the early Church saw not, the whole current of events of history and prophecy having been fulfilled, and being fulfilled, in these last days, showing that the time is narrowing, and that what was an object of far distant hope to those who lived in Apostolic times, is now brought close to us, even at our very doors. Those who have loved and laboured for, and honoured Christ amidst indifference and coldness and opposition—who have enjoyed His living presence in their hearts, and have remained faithful amid the faithless, will then be crowned with glory and honour and immortality; for when He who is their life shall appear, they shall also appear with Him in Glory. Then shall be seen the true character of men in the light of that Presence from which nothing is now hid, and it will be manifest, whether to individuals or Churches, that only they who have patiently endured to the end—who have earnestly contended for the faith of Christ, who have refused the world's glittering bribes, and resisted its bewitching charms—who have not been ashamed of Him in this sinful generation, shall sit down with Him on His throne; and then receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved shall remain firm and undisturbed, when everything else shall be shaken. Blessed Jesus, Thou who didst, after overcoming death, open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers, ever keep our eyes fixed on that glorious inheritance which Thou hast provided for Thy people, when we shall no longer see Thee dimly in type and shadow, but behold Thee face to face, and drink of the river of Thy pleasures, and with the plenteousness of Thy house be abundantly satisfied (Ps. xxxvi. 8.)

Ver. 22. *Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς*

ἐκκλησίαις. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.* (Compare ii. 7.) The messages to the Seven Churches which have now been considered in regular sequence, here close. In them we may see every phase of Christian life and Christian experience clearly depicted—the secret of a Church's strength and the safeguards by which it may be maintained; while on the other hand we may learn the dangers, temptations, and evil influences, by which Churches, as well as individuals, may fall away and perish. We may hear the voice of the Head of the Church exhorting, encouraging and approving; or rebuking, threatening, and condemning. The same voice is still heard among the Churches, for Christ still "walks amidst the seven golden candlesticks," not the literal Asiatic Churches, some of which have now become extinct, but the Churches represented by them, and for whose instruction and guidance the messages were communicated. It has been thought that in these messages there is a gradual development of the Kingdom of God, from its first beginnings on earth to its grand consummation in heaven. It may be fanciful, but there is no doubt a singular correspondence, indeed in some respects a remarkable coincidence, between the promises to the several Churches, and the chronological unfolding of the Church throughout the different dispensations.

The promise to the faithful in Ephesus is, that they should eat of the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God. This brings us back to Eden, and tells us of the Church of God there, when the tree of life was guarded by Cherubim and a flaming sword, and man was driven out from the enjoyment of primæval bliss, on account of that first act of disobedience which brought death into our world and all our woe.

To Smyrna the promise is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Here is the bow in the

cloud, the removal of the curse, and the offer of eternal life through a Saviour. Next Pergamum, with the promise of the hidden manna and the white stone, the Urim and Thummim, as has been supposed by some, corresponding to the Church in the wilderness and the Mosaic dispensation in general. Thyatira has the promise held out to the faithful in her, of power over the nations, in which we are told there is a representation of the palmy days of king Solomon, when the Jewish kingdom, collateral with the Church, extended from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth, and when all nations were brought under his sway. The scene now changes and next ushers in the kingdom of a greater than Solomon, and the honours and triumphs to be obtained by those who are faithful. The Church of Sardis, with the white raiment of those who have not defiled their garments, speaks of the blessings resulting from the Second Advent, the registry in the Lamb's book of life, the acknowledgment of His servants before His Father, and the glorified bodies of the Saints.

To the faithful in Philadelphia is promised heavenly citizenship, the high honour of being members of the New Jerusalem, where no friend ever departs, and no enemy can ever enter. This honour is enjoyed in common by all whose names are on the roll of Heaven. And then the last is still the best —the Laodicean witness, who has overcome the lukewarmness of that Church, is to have exceeding glory. He is to sit down with Christ on His throne. What more than this could the most ardent spiritual heart desire—to sit with Christ when He shall come in His kingdom, to share the honours of His royalty, to enter into sweetest communion with Him, and to learn from Him some of the "many things" which the disciples could not bear when He was on earth, and to understand the unfolding of those mysteries which He alluded to when He said, "what I do thou knowest not now,

but thou shalt know hereafter." Whether these coincidences have any solid foundation has been disputed; but one thing is clear, there is not a single phase in the whole development of the life of God in the soul, or the progress and power of religion in the Churches, but is here marked most minutely as beacons for all time to come, alike to warn the Christian voyager of danger, and to guide him into the desired haven.

It would be contrary to the original intention of these observations on the Seven Churches, and outside the sphere of interpretation, to speak of the condition of these Churches in the period subsequent to that in which these messages were sent; but any one interested in this inquiry would find valuable help from a work already referred to, entitled, *The Seven Golden Candlesticks*, by Dr. Tristram, who treats of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor from a historic point of view, giving in detail their past distinctive features, and also the present condition of the cities where these Churches once existed.

Some of them long survived the period when St. John wrote. It should not be forgotten that more than three hundred years after the time of St. John, the Christian faith flourished in Ephesus, for in A.D. 431, a General Council of the Church was held there to condemn the heresy of Nestorius. Nor should we omit to state that Smyrna, which suffered so much from successive persecutions, still maintained its Christian character long after the removal of the last of the Apostles, for there in A.D. 167, Polycarp, its Bishop, the disciple of St. John, suffered martyrdom in the persecution under Marcus Aurelius. Indeed, amid the vicissitudes of war and tumult Smyrna has never yet allowed the lamp of life to become extinguished, and it is even now spoken of with scorn by the Moslem, as "the infidel Smyrna."

At Sardis, although its name appears rarely in Christian history, there was one remarkable man in the second

century, Melito, its Bishop, who travelled to Palestine in order to acquire information regarding the Canonical books of Holy Scripture; and his catalogue is the earliest made by any Christian writer. This was completed about A.D. 170. And in the fourth century we find Sardis still holding forth its Christian character in being famous for the Council held there in A.D. 347.

Philadelphia was the last of the Christian cities of Asia Minor taken by the Turks. In A.D. 1391, when Orchan subjugated the whole of Asia Minor, Philadelphia still held out, and at last it was taken by treachery. It has never lost its freedom, and its Christian independence, for it is still erect, as Gibbon has recorded—"a column in a scene of ruins"—and has even now, within its walls, more than 6000 Christians.

Laodicea too, the lukewarm Church, must have roused itself from its apathy, influenced by the solemn warning addressed to it; for there is evidence also that in the latter half of the second century, that Church occupied a very prominent position, as Laodicea seems to have been the head-quarters of the controversy which then arose about the regulation of the Easter Festival;[1] and in A.D. 363, an important Council was held there for determining some points of Church discipline, but incidentally the Bishops were led to make an order settling the Canon of Scripture.[2] Both Laodicea and Hierapolis were always represented by their Bishops at all the more important assemblies of the Church, thus showing clearly that, long after the time of St. John, these Churches existed, and proving, against the "Mythical" interpreters, the historic character of all these Churches. The tread of the False Prophet has been painfully felt over that region in which

[1] Lightfoot, *On Churches of the Lycus*, p. 64.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

these ancient Churches lay, yet still the Crescent has not been able to extinguish the Cross. Christianity is destined to ultimately triumph. While the other religions of the world are getting feebler, and gradually decaying, Christianity possesses the dew of its youth. There is no future for the races which are now under the rule of the False Prophet; there is none for the Hindoo, and other pagan nations; but there is a mighty future for nations professing Christianity. It is therefore going forth conquering and to conquer. Never can it fail, because its Author "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Let us thankfully receive and hold fast the Truth, assured, that in doing so, we are erecting a fabric which will stand; building, like the wise man, upon a rock; and thus grounded and established, we can await every event of Providence in calm composure, feeling that

> "Behind the dim unknown,
> Standeth God within the shadow, keeping
> Watch above His own,"—

and recognising in every fresh change, in each new disclosure, each gradual fulfilment of prophecy, those premonitory signs which the Church in these last days has been bidden to expect, of that great event which is to turn the long night of her sorrow into joy, when her absent Lord shall come forth from within the veil, and be greeted by the acclamations of a mighty throng that no man could number, as "KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS."

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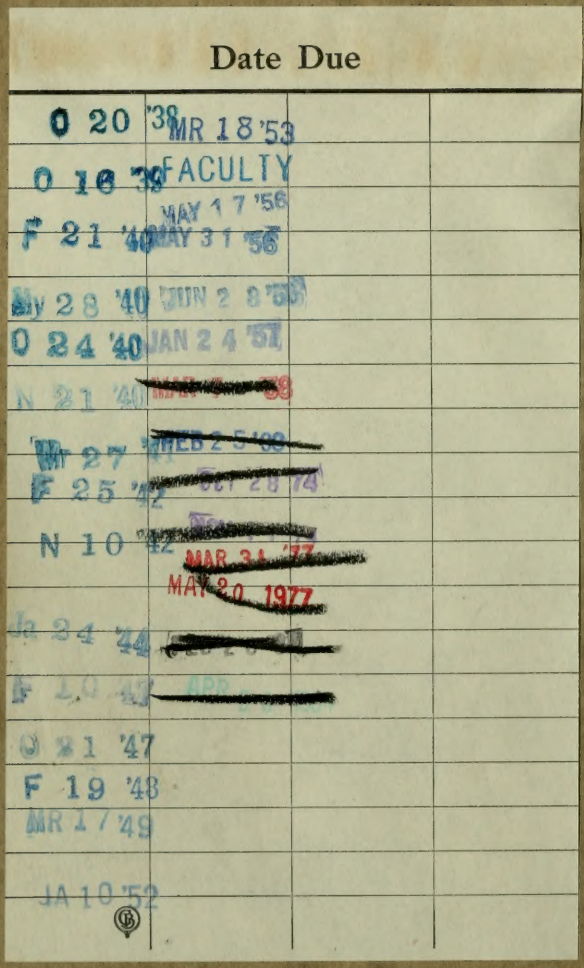
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